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Gorki





# ORLÓFF AND HIS WIFE





MAXIM GORKY





AUTHORIZED EDITION

# ORLÓFF AND HIS WIFE

*TALES OF THE BAREFOOT  
BRIGADE*

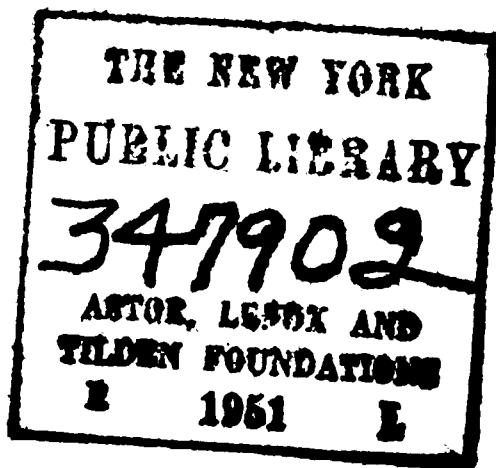
BY

MAXIM GORKY

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*Sigui-Sorgorod*  
*28 Mai 1901.*

*Monsieur,*

Ayant reçu votre honorée lettre je m'empresse de vous  
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seuls éditeurs comme traducteurs de maïs oeuvres du russe  
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Agriez, Monsieur, mes bien sincères sala-  
tations.

*Marsennus Popov*

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\* Date of first publication.



# **ORLÓFF AND HIS WIFE**



## ORLÓFF AND HIS WIFE

ALMOST every Saturday, just before the All-Night Vigil Service,\* from two windows in the cellar of merchant Petúnnikoff's old and filthy house, opening on the narrow court-yard encumbered with various utensils, and built up with wooden servants'-quarters rickety with age, broke forth the vehement shrieks of a woman:

"Stop! Stop, you drunken devil!" the woman cried in a low contralto voice.

"Let go!" replied a man's tenor voice.

"I won't, I won't. I'll give it to you, you monster!"

"You li-ie! You will let me go!"

"You may kill me—but I won't!"

"You? You li-ie, you heretic!"

"Heavens! He has murdered me . . . he-eavens!"

"Will you let go?!"

"Beat away, you wild beast, beat me to death!"

"You can wait. . . . I won't do it all at once!"

At the first words of this dialogue, Sénka Tchízhik, the apprentice of house-painter Sutchkóff, who ground paint whole days together in one of the small sheds in the court-

\*The evening service, composed of Vespers and Matins, which is used on Saturdays, and on the Eves of most other Feast-days. Sunday begins with sunset on Saturday, in the Holy Catholic Orthodox Church of the East, and the appointed evening service is obligatory before the Liturgy can be celebrated on Sunday morning.—*Translator*,



## Orlóff and His Wife

yard, flew headlong thence, his little eyes, black as those of a mouse, sparkling, yelling at the top of his voice:

"Shoemaker Orlóff and his wife are fighting! My eye! what a lively time they're having!"

Tchízhik, who was passionately fond of all possible sorts of events, rushed to the windows of the Orlóffs' lodgings, flung himself on the ground on his stomach, and hanging down his shaggy, saucy head, with its bold, thin face streaked with ochre and reddish-brown paint, he gazed down with eager eyes into the dark, damp hole, which reeked of mould, shoemakers' wax and musty leather. There, at the bottom of it, two figures were jerking about in a fury, screaming hoarsely, groaning and cursing.

"You'll kill me . . ." warned the woman, with a sigh.

"N-ne-ever m-mind!"—her husband soothed her confidently, and with concentrated venom.

Dull, heavy blows on some soft object resounded, sighs, piercing screams, the strained groaning of a man who is moving about a heavy weight.

"Oh my! I-is-n't he just giving it to her with the last!" said Tchízhik with a lisp, illustrating the course of events in the cellar, while the audience which had gathered around him—tailors, messenger of the courts Levtchénko, Kislyakóff the accordeon-player, and others who were fond of gratuitous entertainments—kept asking Sénka, pulling, in their impatience, at his legs and little breeches all impregnated with greasy paints:

"Well? What's going on now? What's he doing to her?"

"He's sitting astride of her, and banging her snout against the floor," reported Sénka, curling up voluptuously with the impressions which he was experiencing.

## Orlóff and His Wife

The spectators bent over also, to the Orlóffs' windows, being seized with a burning desire to see all the details of the fight for themselves; and although they had long known the ways which Grísha \* Orlóff employed in his war with his wife, still they expressed surprise:

"Akh, the devil! Has he smashed her up?"

"Her nose is all bloody . . . and he keeps on banging her!" reported Sénka, choking with delight.

"Akh, Lord my God!"—cried the women.—"Akh, the tormenting-monster!"

The men judged more objectively.

"Without fail, he'll beat her to death!" said they.

And the accordeon-player announced in the tone of a seer:

"Remember my words—he'll disembowel her with a knife! One of these days he'll get tired of cutting up in this fashion, and he'll put an end to the music at one blow!"

"He's done!" reported Sénka, springing up from the ground, and bounding away like a ball from the windows, to one side, to a nook where he took up another post of observation, being aware that Grísha Orlóff would immediately emerge into the court-yard.

The spectators rapidly dispersed, as they did not care to fall under the eye of the savage shoemaker; now that the battle was over, he had lost all interest in their eyes, and he was decidedly dangerous, to boot.

And generally, there was not a living soul in the court-yard except Sénka, when Orlóff made his appearance from his cellar. Breathing heavily, in a torn shirt, with his hair rumped all over his head, with scratches on his perspiring and excited face, he scrutinized the court-yard with

\* *Grísha* and *Gríshka* are the diminutives of *Grigóry*.—*Translator*.

## Orlóff and His Wife

a sidelong glance, with eyes suffused with blood, and clasping his hands behind his back, he walked slowly to an old carrier's sledge, which lay with runners upward, against the wall of the wood-shed. Sometimes he whistled valiantly as he did so, and stared about in all directions exactly as though he had the intention of challenging the entire population of the Petúnnikoff house to a fight. Then he seated himself on the runners of the sledge, wiped the blood and sweat from his face with his shirt-sleeve, and fell into a fatigued attitude, gazing dully at the wall of the house, which was dirty with peeling stucco and decorated with motley-hued stripes of paint,—as Sutchkóff's painters, on their return from work, had a habit of cleaning their brushes against that part of the wall.

Orlóff was about thirty years of age. His bronzed, nervous face, with delicate features, was adorned with a small, dark mustache, which sharply shaded his full, red lips. His eyebrows almost met above his large, cartilaginous nose; from beneath them gazed black eyes which always blazed uneasily. His curly hair, tangled in front, fell behind over a sinewy, light-brown neck. Of medium stature, and somewhat round-shouldered from his work, muscular and ardent, he sat for a long time on the sledge, in a sort of benumbed condition, and surveyed the paint-bedaubed wall, breathing deeply with his healthy, swarthy breast.

The sun had already set, but it was stifling in the courtyard; it smelled of oil-paints, tar, sour cabbage, and something rotten. From all the windows in both stories of the house which opened on the court-yard, poured songs and scolding; from time to time someone's intoxicated countenance inspected Orlóff for a minute, being thrust forth from behind a window-jamb and withdrawn with a laugh.

The painters made their appearance from their work;

## Orlóff and His Wife

as they passed Orlóff they cast furtive glances at him, exchanging winks among themselves, and filling the courtyard with the lively dialect of Kostromá, they made ready to go out, some to the bath, some to the pot-house. From above, from the second story, tailors crept out into the court—a half-clad, consumptive and bow-legged lot of men—and began to make fun of the Kostromá painters for their mode of speech, which rattled about like peas. The whole court was filled with noise, with daring, lively laughter, with jests. . . . Orlóff sat in his corner and maintained silence, not even casting a glance at anyone. No one approached him, and no one could make up his mind to ridicule him, for everyone knew that now he was—a raging wild beast.

He sat there, the prey to a dull and heavy wrath, which oppressed his breast, made breathing difficult, and his nostrils quivered rapaciously from time to time while his lips curled in a snarl, laying bare two rows of large, strong, yellow teeth. Within him something dark and formless was springing up, red, turbid spots swam before his eyes, grief and a thirst for vódka sucked at his entrails. He knew that he would feel better when he had had a drink, but it was still daylight, and it mortified him to go to the dram-shop in such a tattered and disreputable condition through the street where everybody knew him, Grigóry Orlóff.

He knew his own value, and did not wish to go out as a general laughing-stock, but neither could he go home to wash and dress himself. There, on the floor, lay his wife whom he had unmercifully beaten, and now she was repulsive to him in every way.

She was groaning there, and he felt that she was a martyr, and that she was right, so far as he was concerned—

## Orlóff and His Wife

he knew that. He knew, also, that she was really in the right, and he was to blame, but this still further augmented his hatred toward her, because, along with this consciousness a dark, evil feeling was seething in his soul, and it was more powerful than the consciousness. Everything within him was heavy and confused, and, without any exertion of his will, he gave himself over to the weight of his inward sensations, unable to disentangle them, and knowing that nothing but half a bottle of vodka would afford him relief.

Now Kislyakóff the accordeon-player comes along. He is clad in a sleeveless cotton-velvet jacket, over a red silk shirt, with voluminous trousers tucked into dandified boots. Under his arm is his accordeon in a green bag, the ends of his small black mustache are twisted into arrows, his cap is set dashingly on one side, and his whole countenance is beaming with audacity and jollity. Orlóff loves him for his audacity, for his playing, and for his merry character, and envies him his easy, care-free life.

“ Congratulations, Grísha,\* on your vi-ic-to-ory,  
And on your well-scr-a-a-atched cheek ! ”

Orlóff did not fly into a rage with him for this joke, although he had already heard it fifty times, and besides, the accordeon-player did not say it out of malice, but simply because he was fond of joking.

“ What now, brother! Had another Plevna? ”—asked Kislyakóff, halting for a minute in front of the shoemaker.

“ Ekh, Grísha, you’re a ripe melon! You ought to go where the road for all of us lies . . . You and I might have a bite together . . . ”

\* See footnote, p. 5.

## Orlóff and His Wife

"I'm coming soon . . ." said Orlóff, without raising his head.

"I'll wait and suffer for you . . ."

And before long, Orlóff went off after him.

Then, from the cellar emerged a small, plump woman, clinging to the wall as she went. Her head was closely enveloped in a kerchief, and from the aperture over the face, only one eye, and a bit of the cheek and forehead peeped out. She walked, staggering, across the court, and seated herself on the same spot where her husband had been sitting not long before. Her appearance surprised no one—they had got used to it, and everybody knew that there she would sit until Grísha, intoxicated and in a repentant mood, should make his appearance from the dram-shop. She came out into the court, because it was suffocating in the cellar, and for the purpose of leading drunken Grísha down the stairs. The staircase was half-decayed, and steep; Grísha had tumbled down it one day, and had sprained his wrist, so that he had not worked for a fortnight, and, during that time, they had pawned nearly all their chattels to feed themselves.

From that time forth, Matréná had kept watch for him.

Now and then someone from the court would sit down beside her. Most frequently of all, the person who did so was Levtchénko, a mustached non-commissioned officer on the retired list, an argumentative and sedate Little Russian, with close-cut hair and a blue nose. He would seat himself, and inquire, with a yawn:

"Been banging each other round again?"

"What's that to you?" said Matréná, in a hostile and irritable manner.

"Oh, nothing!" explained the Little Russian, and after that, neither of them spoke again for a long time.

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Matryóna breathed heavily, and there was a rattling in her chest.

"Why are you always fighting? What scores have you to settle?"—the Little Russian would begin to argue.

"That's our affair . . ." said Matréná Orlóff curtly.

"That's so, it is your affair . . ." assented Levtchénko, and he even nodded his head in confirmation of what had been said.

"Then what are you poking your nose into my business for?" argued Mrs. Orlóff \* logically.

"Phew . . . what a touchy woman you are! One can't say a word to you! As I look at it—you and Grísha are a well-matched pair! He ought to give you a good drubbing with a club every day—morning and night—that's what he ought! Then neither of you would be such hedge-hogs . . ."

And off he went, in a towering rage, which thoroughly pleased her:—for a long time past, a rumor had been going the rounds of the court-yard, to the effect that the Little Russian was not making up to her for nothing, and she was angry with him, with him and with all people who intruded themselves on other folks' affairs. But the Little Russian walked off to the corner of the court with his upright, soldierly gait, alert and strong despite his forty years.

Then Tchízhik bobbed up under his feet from somewhere or other.

"She's a bitter radish too, that Auntie Orlíkha!" he confided to Levtchénko, in an undertone, with a sly wink in the direction where Matréná was sitting.

"Well, I'll prescribe that sort of a radish for you, when

\* "Mrs. Orloff" is rather a stiff rendering of the feminine form "Orlóva," minus all prefix, which is not at all disrespectful in Russian, but is somewhat confusing in English.—*Translator*.

## Orlóff and His Wife

you need one!" threatened the Little Russian, laughing behind his mustache. He was fond of impudent Tchízhik, and listened attentively to him, being aware that all the secrets of the court-yard were known to Tchízhik.

"You can't do any fishing round her,"—explained Tchízhik, paying no attention to the threat.—"Maxím the painter tried it, and bang! she let fly such a slap in the face at him! I heard it myself . . . a healthy whack! Straight in his ugly face . . . just as though it had been a drum!"

Half-child, half-man, in spite of his fifteen years, lively and impressionable, he eagerly absorbed, like a sponge, the dirt of the life around him, and on his brow there was a thin wrinkle, which showed that Sénka Tchízhik was given to thinking.

. . . It was dark in the court-yard. Above it shone a quadrangular bit of blue sky, all glittering with stars, and surrounded by lofty roofs, so that the court seemed to be a deep pit, when one looked up out of it. In one corner of this pit sat a tiny female form, resting after her beating, and awaiting her drunken husband . . .

The Orlóffs had been married three years. They had had a child, but after living for about a year and a half, it died; neither of them mourned it long, being consoled with the hope that they would have another. The cellar, in which they had taken up their abode, was a large, long, dark room with a vaulted ceiling. Directly at the door stood a huge Russian stove, facing the windows; between it and the wall a narrow passage led into a square space, lighted by two windows, which opened on the court-yard. The light fell through them into the cellar in slanting, turbid streaks, and the atmosphere in the room was damp,



## Orlóff and His Wife

dull, dead. Life pulsed somewhere, far away, up above, but only faint, ill-defined sounds of it were wafted hither, and fell, together with the dust, into the Orlóffs' hole, in a sort of formless, colorless flakes. Opposite the stove, against the wall, stood a wooden double-bed, with print curtains of a cinnamon-brown dotted with pink flowers; opposite the bed, against the other wall, was a table, on which they drank tea and dined; and between the bed and the wall, the husband and wife worked, in the two streaks of light.

Cockroaches travelled indolently over the walls, feeding on the bread-crumbs with which various little pictures from old newspapers were stuck to the plaster; melancholy flies flitted about everywhere, buzzing tiresomely, and the little pictures, which they had covered with specks, stood out like dark spots against the dirty-gray background of the walls.

The Orlóffs' day began after this fashion: at six o'clock in the morning, Matréná awoke, washed herself, and prepared the samovár, which had more than once been crippled in the heat of battle, and was covered all over with patches of lead. While the samovár was coming to a boil, she put the room in order, went to the shop,\* then roused her husband; he rose, washed himself, and the samovár was already standing on the table, hissing and purring. They sat down to drink tea, with white bread, of which, together, they ate a pound.

Grigóry worked well, and he always had work; after tea he portioned it out. He did the fine work, which required the hand of a master, his wife prepared the waxed ends, pasted in the linings, put on the outside layer on the heels,

\* In Russian towns, people go or send, every morning, to the shops, for bread, cream, butter.—*Translator.*

## Orlóff and His Wife

and did other trifling jobs of that sort. After tea, they discussed their dinner. In winter, when it was necessary to eat more, this was a tolerably interesting question; in summer, from economy, they heated the oven only on feast-days, and not always then, feeding themselves chiefly on a cold dish made of kvas,\* with the addition of onions, salt-fish, sometimes of meat, boiled in the oven of someone in the court-yard. When they had finished their tea, they sat down to work: Grigóry on a small kneading-trough, covered with leather, and with a crack in the side, his wife by his side, on a low bench.

At first they worked in silence,—what had they to talk about? They exchanged a couple of words about their work, and maintained silence for half an hour, or more, at a stretch. The hammer tapped, the waxed-ends hissed, as they were drawn through the leather. Grigóry yawned from time to time, and invariably concluded his yawn with a prolonged roar or howl. Matréná sighed and held her peace. Sometimes Orlóff started a song. He had a sharp voice, with a metallic ring, but he knew how to sing. The words of the song were arranged in a swift, plaintive recitative, and now burst impetuously from Grigóry's breast, as though afraid to finish what they wished to say, now, all of a sudden, lengthened out into mournful sighs, or—with a wail of "ekh!"—flew in loud, melancholy strains, through the windows into the court. Matréná sang an accompaniment to her husband, with her soft contralto. The faces of both grew pensive, and sad, Grísha's dark eyes became dimmed with moisture. His wife, absorbed in the sounds, seemed to grow stupid, and sat as though

\* A tart, non-intoxicating, liquor—thin beer—made by fermenting sour rye bread, or rye meal. Sometimes raisins, straw or water-melon juice are used to flavor it.—*Translator.*

## Orlóff and His Wife

half-dozing, swaying from side to side, and sometimes the song seemed to choke her, and she broke off in the middle of a note, and then went on with it, in harmony with her husband. Neither of them was conscious of the presence of the other while they were singing, and striving to pour forth in the words of others the emptiness and dulness of their gloomy life; perhaps they wished to give expression, in these words, to the half-conscious thoughts and sensations, which sprang into life in their souls.

At times Gríshka improvised:

“E-okh, thou life, . . . ekh, yea, thou, my thrice-accursed life . . .  
And thou, oh grief! Ekh, and thou, my cursed grief,  
Maledictions on thee, gri-i-ief!” . . .

Matréna did not like these improvisations, and, on such occasions, she generally asked him:

“Why are you howling, like a dog before a corpse?”

For some reason, he instantly flew into a rage with her:

“You blunt-snouted pig! What can you understand?  
You marsh-spectre!”

“He howled, and howled, and now he has taken to barking . . .”

“Your business is to hold your tongue! Who am I—your foreman, I’d like to know, that you meddle and read me lectures, hey? . . . Just so!”

Matréna, perceiving that the sinews of his neck were becoming tense, and that his eyes were blazing with wrath, held her peace, held it for a long time, demonstratively evading a reply to the questions of her husband, whose wrath died out as rapidly as it had flared up.

She turned away from his glances, which sought reconciliation with her, awaited her smiles, and was completely filled with a palpitating feeling of fear, lest he should fly

## Orlóff and His Wife

into a passion with her again for this play of hers with him. But, at the same time, she was incensed at him, and was greatly pleased to observe his efforts to make peace with her,—for this signified living, thinking, experiencing agitation.

They were both of them young and healthy, they loved each other, and were proud of each other. . . . Gríshka was so strong, ardent, handsome, and Matréná was white, plump, with a spark of fire in her gray eyes,—“a buxom woman,” as they called her in the court-yard. They loved each other, but their life was so tiresome, they had hardly any interests and impressions which could, occasionally, afford them the possibility of getting a rest from each other, and might have satisfied the natural demand of the human soul—to feel excitement, to think, to glow—in short, to live. For under such conditions of lack of external impressions and interests which lend a zest to life, husband and wife—even when they are persons of highly cultivated minds—are bound, inevitably, to become repulsive to each other. This law is as inevitable as it is just. If the Orlóffs had had an aim in life, even so limited an aim as the amassing of money, penny by penny, they would, undoubtedly, in that case, have got along better together.

But they had not even that.

Being constantly under each other's eye, they had grown used to each other, knew each other's every word and gesture. Day after day passed by, and brought into their life nothing which might have diverted their attention. Sometimes, on holidays, they went to visit others as poor in spirit as themselves, and sometimes visitors came to see them, ate, drank and, frequently—fought. And then again the colorless days dragged by, like the links of an invisible

## Orlóff and His Wife

chain of toil which burdened the lives of these people, of tediousness, and senseless irritation against each other.

Sometimes Grishka said:

“What a life—a witch is its grandmother! And why was it ever given to me? Work and tediousness, tediousness and work . . .” And after a pause, with eyes cast upward toward the ceiling, and a wavering smile, he resumed:—“My mother bore me, by the will of God . . . there’s no gainsaying that! I learned my trade . . . and why? Weren’t there shoemakers enough without me? Well, all right, I’m a shoemaker, and what then? What satisfaction is there for me in that? . . . I sit in a pit and sew . . . Then I shall die. Now, there’s the cholera coming, they say . . . Well, what of that? Grigory Orlóff lived, made shoes—and died of the cholera. What virtue is there in that? And why was it necessary that I should live, make shoes and die, hey?”

Matréna made no reply, conscious that there was something terrible about her husband’s words; but, now and then, she begged him not to utter such words, because they were contrary to God, Who must know how to arrange a man’s life. And sometimes, when she was not in good spirits, she sceptically announced to her husband:

“You’d better stop drinking liquor—then you’d find life more cheerful, and such thoughts wouldn’t creep into your head. Other folks live,—they don’t complain, and they hoard up a little pile of money, and with it set up their own work-shops, and then they live after their own hearts, like lords!”

“And you come out with those nonsensical words of yours, you devil’s doll! Use your brains—can I help drinking, if that is my only joy? Others! How many such successful folks do you know? And was I like that be-

## Orlóff and His Wife

fore my marriage? If you speak according to your conscience, it's you who are sucking me, and harassing my life . . . Ugh, you toad!"

Matréna was angered, but felt that her husband was right. In a state of intoxication he was jolly and amiable,—the other people were the fruit of her imagination,—and he had not been like that before his marriage. He had been a jolly fellow then, engaging and kind. And now he had become a regular wild beast.

"Why is it so? Am I really a burden to him?" she thought.

Her heart contracted at that bitter reflection, she felt sorry for herself, and for him; she went up to him, and caressingly, affectionately gazing into his eyes, pressed close to his breast.

"Well, now you're going to lick yourself, you cow . . ." said Gríshka surlily, and pretended that he wished to thrust her from him; but she knew that he would not do it, and pressed closer and harder against him.

Then his eyes flashed, he flung his work on the floor, and setting his wife on his knees, he kissed her much and long, sighing from a full heart, and saying, in a low voice, as though afraid that someone would overhear him:

"E-ekh, Mótrya! \* Aï, aï, how ill you and I live together . . . we snarl at each other like wild beasts . . . and why? Such is my star . . . a man is born beneath a star, and the star is his fate!"

But this explanation did not satisfy him, and straining his wife to his breast, he sank into thought.

They sat thus for a long time, in the murky light and close air of their cellar. She held her peace and sighed, but sometimes in such fair moments as these, she recalled the

\* Mótrya is the diminutive for Matréna.—*Translator.*

## Orlóff and His Wife

undeserved insults and beatings administered by him, and with quiet tears she complained to him of them.

Then he, abashed by her fond reproaches, caressed her yet more ardently, and she poured forth her heart in more and more complaints. At last, this irritated him.

“Stop your jawing! How do you know but that it hurts me a thousand times more than it does you when I thrash you. Do you understand? Well, then, stop your noise! Give you and the like of you free sway, and they’d fly at one’s throat. Drop the subject. What can you say to a man if life has made a devil of him?”

At other times he softened under the flood of her quiet tears, and passionate remonstrances, and explained, sadly and thoughtfully:

“What am I, with my character, to do? I insult you . . . that’s true. I know that you and I are one soul—but sometimes I forget that. Do you understand, Mó-trya, that there are times when I can’t bear the sight of you? Just as though I had had a surfeit of you. And, at such times, such a vicious feeling comes up under my heart—I could tear you to bits, and myself along with you. And the more in the right you are, as against me, the more I want to thrash you . . .”

She hardly understood him, but the repentant, affectionate tone soothed her.

“God grant, that we may get straight somehow, that we may get used to each other”—she said, not recognizing the fact that they had long ago got used to each other, and had drained each other.

“Now, if we only had had some children born to us—we should get along better,” she sometimes added, with a sigh. —“We should have had an amusement, and an anxiety.”

## Orlóff and His Wife

“Well, what ails you? Bear some . . .”

“Yes . . . you see, I can’t bear any, with these thrashings of yours. You beat me awfully hard on the body and ribs. . . . If only you wouldn’t use your feet on me . . .”

“Come now,—” Grigóry gruffly and in confusion defended himself,—“can a man stop to consider at such a time, where and with what he ought to thrash? And I’m not the hangman, either, . . . and I don’t beat you for my amusement, but from grief . . .”

“And how was this grief bred in you?”—asked Matréná mournfully.

“Such is my fate, Mótrya!—” philosophized Gríshka. “My fate, and the character of my soul . . . Look, am I any worse than the rest, than that Little Russian, for example? Only, the Little Russian lives on and does not feel melancholy. He’s alone, he has no wife, nothing . . . I should perish without you . . . But he doesn’t mind it! . . . He smokes his pipe and smiles; he’s contented, the devil, just because he’s smoking his pipe. But I can’t do like that. . . . I was born, evidently, with uneasiness in my heart. That’s the sort of character I have. . . . The Little Russian’s is—like a stick, but mine is like—a spring; when you press it, it shakes . . . I go out, for instance, into the street, I see this thing, that thing, a third thing, but I have nothing myself. This angers me. The Little Russian—he wants nothing, but I get mad, also, because he, that mustached devil, doesn’t want anything, while I . . . I don’t even know what I want . . . everything! So there now! Here I sit in a hole, and work all the time, and have nothing. And there, again, it’s your fault . . . You’re my wife, and what is there about you that’s in-



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teresting? One woman's just like another woman, with the whole lot of females . . . I know everything in you; how you will sneeze to-morrow—and I know it, because you have sneezed before me a thousand times, probably. . . . And so what sort of life, and what interest can I have? There's no interest. Well, and so I go and sit in the dram-shop, because it's cheerful there."

"But why did you marry?"—asked Matréná.

"Why?"—Gríshka laughed.—"The devil knows why I did. . . . I oughtn't to have done it, to tell the truth. . . . It would have been better to start out as a tramp. . . . Then, if you are hungry, you're free—go where you like! March all over the world!"

"Then go, and set me at liberty," blurted out Matréná, on the verge of bursting into tears.

"Where are you going?"—inquired Gríshka insinuatingly.

"That's my business."

"Whe-ere?" and his eyes lighted up with an evil glare. "Say!"

"Don't yell—I'm not afraid of you . . ."

"Have you got your eye on somebody else? Say?"

"Let me go!"

"Let you go where?"—bellowed Gríshka.

He had already grasped her by the hair, pushing the kerchief off her head. Beatings exasperated her, but anger afforded her immense delight, stirring up her whole soul, and, instead of extinguishing his jealousy by a couple of words, she proceeded still further to enrage him, smiling up into his face with strange, extremely significant smiles. He flew into a fury, and beat her, beat her mercilessly.

But at night when, all broken, and crushed, she lay groaning beside him in bed, he stared askance at her, and

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sighed heavily. He felt ill at ease, his conscience tortured him, he understood that there was no foundation for his jealousy, and that he had beaten her without cause.

"Come, that will do, . . ." he said abashed.—"Am I to blame, if I have that sort of character? And you're nice, too. . . . Instead of persuading me—you spur me on. Why did you find it necessary to do it?"

She held her peace, but she knew why, knew that now, all beaten and wronged as she was, she might expect his caresses, the passionate and tender caresses of reconciliation. For this she was ready to pay every day with pain in her bruised sides.—And she was already weeping, with the mere joy of anticipation, even before her husband succeeded in touching her.

"Come, enough of that, Mótrya! Come, my darling, won't you? Have done, forgive me, do!"—He smoothed her hair, kissed her, and gnashed his teeth with the bitterness which filled his whole being.

Their windows were open, but the main wall of the neighboring house hid the sky, and in their room, as always, it was dark, and stifling and close.

"Ekh, life! Thou art a magnificent hard-labor prison!"—whispered Gríshka, unable to express what he so painfully felt.—"It comes from this hole, Mótrya. What are we? Something as though we were buried in the earth before our death . . ."

"Let's move into another lodging,"—suggested Matréna, through sweet tears, understanding his words literally.

"E-ekh! No you don't, aunty! If you betake yourself to a garret, you'll still be in a hole, . . . it isn't the lodging that's the hole . . . but life—that's the hole!"

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Matréna reflected, and began again:

"God willing, we may reform ourselves . . . we shall get used to one another."

"Yes, we'll reform. . . . You often say that. . . . But it doesn't look like reform with us. . . . The rows get more frequent all the time,—understand?"

That was unqualifiedly true. The intervals between their fights kept growing shorter and shorter, and here, at last, every Saturday, Gríshka began from early in the morning to screw himself up into a hostile mood against his wife.

"This evening I'm going to cut work, and go to meet Lýsy in the dram-shop. . . . I shall get drunk . . ." he announced.

Matréna, puckering up her eyes strangely, made no reply.

"You won't speak? Well then, just go on holding your tongue—it'll be better for your health,—" he said warningly.

In the course of the day, with irritation which increased in proportion as the evening drew near,—he reminded her several times of his intention to get drunk, was conscious that it pained her to hear this, and perceiving that she maintained a persistent silence, with a firm gleam in her eyes, preparing for the struggle, he strode about the room and raged all the more furiously.

In the evening, the herald of their unhappiness, Sénka Tchízhik, proclaimed the "brattle." \*

When he had finished beating his wife, Gríshka vanished, sometimes for the whole night, sometimes he did not even put in an appearance on Sunday. She, covered

\* Sénka twists his words, in a way which cannot always be reproduced. This is a fair specimen.—*Translator.*

## Orlóff and His Wife

with bruises, greeted him morosely, with taciturnity, but was filled with concealed compassion for him, all tattered, and often battered also, in filth, with his eyes suffused with blood.

She knew that he must get over his fit of intoxication, and she had already supplied herself with half a bottle of vódka. He, also, knew this.

"Give me a little glass . . ." he entreated hoarsely, drank off two or three glasses, and sat down to his work.

The day passed with him in gnawings of conscience; often he could not endure their sting, flung aside his work, and swore terrible oaths, as he rushed about the room, or threw himself on the bed. Mòtrya gave him time to simmer down, and then they made peace.

Formerly, this reconciliation had had much that was subtle and sweet about it, but, in the course of time, all this evaporated, and they made peace almost for the sole reason that it was not convenient to remain silent for the five whole days before Sunday.

"You feel sleepy," said Matrénà, with a sigh.

"I do,"—assented Gríshka, and spat aside, with the air of a man to whom it is a matter of utter indifference whether he feels sleepy or not.—"And you're going to scamper off and leave me . . ." he completed the picture of the future, looking searchingly into her eyes.

For some time past, she had taken to dropping them, which she had never been in the habit of doing previously, and Gríshka, taking note of this, frowned portentously, and softly gritted his teeth. But, privily from her husband, she was still frequenting the fortune-tellers and sorceresses, bringing back from them spells, in the form of roots and embers. And when all this was of no avail, she had a prayer-service celebrated to the holy great-martyr

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Vonifánty, who aids drunkards, and as she knelt throughout the prayer-service, she wept burning tears, noiselessly moving her quivering lips.

And more and more frequently did she feel toward her husband a savage, cold hatred, which aroused black thoughts within her, and she had ever less and less of pity for this man who, three years before, had so enriched her life with his merry laughter, his caresses, his affectionate speeches.

Thus these people, in reality, not at all a bad sort of people, lived on, day after day—lived on, fatally anticipating something which should finally smash to atoms their torturingly-foolish life.

One Monday morning, when the Orlóff pair had just begun to drink their tea, the impressive form of a policeman made its appearance on the threshold of the door which led into their cheerless abode. Orlóff sprang from his seat and, with a glance of reproachful alarm at his wife, as he endeavored to reconstruct in his fuddled head the events of the last few days, he stared silently and fixedly at the visitor, with troubled eyes, filled with the most horrible expectation.

“Here, this is the place,—” the policeman invited someone in.

“It’s as dark as the pool under the mill-wheel, devil take merchant Petúnnikoff,—” rang out a young, cheerful voice. Then the policeman stood aside, and into the Orlóffs’ room there stepped briskly a student, in a white duck coat, cap in hand, with close-cut hair, a large, sunburned forehead, and merry brown eyes, which sparkled laughingly from beneath his spectacles.

“Good morning!—” he exclaimed in a bass voice which

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had not yet grown hoarse.—“I have the honor to introduce myself—the sanitary officer! I have come to investigate how you live . . . and to smell your air . . . your air is thoroughly foul!”

Orlóff breathed freely and cordially, and smiled cheerily. He took an instantaneous liking to this noisy student: the fellow's face was so healthy, rosy, kindly, covered on cheeks and chin with golden-brown down. It smiled incessantly, with a peculiar, fresh and clear smile, which seemed to render the Orlóffs' cellar brighter and more cheerful.

“Well then, Mr. and Mrs. Occupant!”—said the student without a pause,—“you must empty your slop-bucket more frequently, that unsavory smell comes from it. I would advise you, aunty, to wash it out very often, and also to sprinkle unslaked lime in the corners, to purify the air . . . and lime is also good as a remedy for dampness. And why have you so bored an aspect, uncle?”—he addressed himself to Orlóff, and immediately seizing him by the hand, he began to feel his pulse.

The student's audacity stunned the Orlóffs. Matréná smiled abstractedly, surveying him in silence. Grigóry also smiled, as he admired his vivacious face, with its golden-brown down.

“How are your little bellies feeling?” inquired the student. “Tell me, without ceremony . . . it's a matter of health, and if there's anything out of order, we'll furnish you with some acid medicines, which will remove all trouble at once.”

“We're all right . . . we're in good health,—” Grigóry finally imparted the information, with a laugh.—“But if I don't look just as I should . . . it's only on the outside . . . for, to tell the truth, I haven't quite got over my drunk.”

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“Exactly so, I discern with my nose that you, my good man, almost got drunk yesterday—just a mere trifle, you know . . .”

He said this so humorously, and made such a grimace to accompany it, that Orlóff fairly split with loud and confidential laughter. Matréná laughed also, covering her mouth with her apron. The student himself laughed the most loudly and merrily of all, and he also stopped sooner than the rest. And when the folds of skin around his chubby mouth, evoked by the laughter, had smoothed themselves out,—his simple, frank face became still more simple, somehow.

“It’s the proper thing for a working man to drink, if he does it moderately, but just at present, it would be better to refrain from liquor altogether. Have you heard how some sickness or other is going about among the people?”

And now, with a serious aspect, he began to explain in intelligible language to the Orlóffs, about the cholera, and about the means of fighting it. As he talked, he walked about the room, now feeling of the wall with his hand, now casting a glance behind the door, into the corner, where hung the wash-basin, and where stood a wash-trough\* filled with slops, and he even bent down and smelled under the stove, to see what the odor was like. His voice broke, every now and then, from bass notes into tenor notes, and the simple words of his remarks seemed to fix themselves firmly, one after another, in the minds

\* The peasant wash-basin consists of a closed vessel which is suspended from the wall, and contains water. The water trickles through a spout or faucet, on the hands—“running” water being regarded as the only clean water. The tub in which clothes are washed is a long trough, rounded at the bottom, and mounted on supports.—*Translator.*

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of his hearers, without any effort on their part. His bright eyes sparkled, and he seemed thoroughly permeated with the ardor of his youthful passion for his work, which he executed so simply and so vigorously.

Grigóry watched his operations with a smile of curiosity. Matréná sniffed from time to time; the policeman had disappeared.

“So you are to attend to the lime to-day, Mr. and Mrs. Occupant. There’s a building going up alongside you, so the masons will give you all you need for about five kopéks. And as for you, goodman, if you can’t be moderate in your drinking, you must let it alone altogether. . . . We-ell, good-by for the time being. . . . I’ll look in on you again.”

And he vanished as swiftly as he had appeared, leaving as mementos of his laughing eyes abashed and satisfied smiles on the countenances of the Orlóff couple.

They remained silent for a minute, staring at each other, and as yet unable to formulate the impression left by this unexpected invasion of conscious energy into their dark, automatic life.

“A-ai!—” drawled Grigóry, shaking his head.—“So there’s . . . a chemist! It is said that they are poisoning folks! But would a man with a face like that occupy himself with that sort of thing? And then again, his voice! And all the rest. . . . No, his manner was perfectly frank, and immediately—‘here now,—here I am!’—Lime . . . is that injurious? Citric acid . . . what’s that? Simply acid, and nothing more! But the chief point is—cleanliness everywhere, in the air, and on the floor, and in the slop-bucket. . . . Is it possible to poison a man by such means? Akh, the devils! Poisoners, say they. . . . That hard-working young fel-



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low, hey? Fie! A workingman ought always to drink in moderation, he says . . . do you hear, Mótrya? So come now, pour me out a little glass . . . there's liquor on hand, isn't there?"

She very willingly poured him out half a cup of vódka from the bottle, which she produced from some place known only to herself.

"That was really a nice fellow . . . he had such a way of making one like him,—” she said, smiling at the remembrance of the student.—“But other fellows, the rest of them—who knows anything about them? Perhaps, they actually are engaged . . . .”

“But engaged for what, and again, by whom?—” exclaimed Grigóry.

“To exterminate the people . . . They say there are so many poor folks, that an order has been issued—to poison the superfluous ones,”—Matréna communicated her information.

“Who says that?”

“Everybody says so. . . . The painters' cook said so, and a great many other folks . . . .”

“Well, they're fools! Would that be profitable? Just consider: they are curing them! How is a body to understand that? They bury them! And isn't that a loss? For a coffin is needed, and a grave, and other things of that sort. . . . Everything is charged to the government treasury. . . . Stuff and nonsense! If they wanted to make a clearing-out and to reduce the number of people, they would have taken and sent them off to Siberia—there's plenty of room for them all there! Or to some uninhabited islands. . . . And after they had exiled them, they would have ordered them to work there. Work and pay your taxes . . . understand? There's a clear-

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ing-out for you, and a very profitable one, to boot. . . . Because an uninhabited island will yield no revenue, if it isn't settled with people. And revenue is the first thing to the public treasury, so it's not to its interest to destroy folks, and to bury them at its expense. . . . Understand? And then, again, that student . . . he's an impudent creature, that's a fact, but he had more to say about the riot; but kill people off, . . . no-o, you couldn't hire him to do that for any amount of pennies! Couldn't you see at a glance, that he wouldn't be capable of such a thing? His phiz wasn't of that calibre . . . ."

All day long they talked about the student, and about everything he had told them. They recalled the sound of his laugh, his face, discovered that one button was missing from his white coat, and came near quarrelling over the question: 'on which side of the breast?' Matréná obstinately maintained that it was on the right side, her husband said—on the left, and twice cursed her stoutly, but remembering in season, that his wife had not turned the bottle bottom upward when she poured the vódka into the cup, he yielded the point to her. Then they decided that on the morrow, they would set to work to introduce cleanliness into their quarters, and again inspired by a breath of something fresh, they resumed their discussion of the student.

"Yes, what a go-ahead fellow he was, really now!"—said Grigóry rapturously.—"He came in, just exactly as though he'd known us for ten years. . . . He sniffed about everywhere, explained everything . . . and that was all! He didn't shout or make a row, although he's one of the authorities, also, of course. . . . Akh, deuce take him! Do you understand, Matréná, they're looking after us there, my dear. That's evident at once. . . ."

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They want to keep us sound, and nothing more, nor less.  
. . . That's all nonsense about killing us off . . .  
old wives' tales. . . . 'How does your belly act?' says  
he. . . . And if they wanted to kill us off, what the  
devil should he have wanted to know about the action of  
my belly for? And how cleverly he explained all about  
those . . . what's their name? those devils that crawl  
about in the bowels, you know?"

"Something after the fashion of cock and bull stories,"  
laughed Matréná,—“I believe he only said that for the  
sake of frightening us, and making folks more particular  
to keep clean . . . .”

“Well, who knows, perhaps there's some truth in that  
. . . for worms breed from dampness. . . . Akh, you  
devil! What did he call those little bugs? It isn't a cock  
and bull story at all, but . . . why, I remember what  
it is! . . . I've got the word on the tip of my tongue,  
but I don't understand . . . .”

And when they lay down to sleep, they were still talk-  
ing about the event of the day, with the same ingenuous  
enthusiasm with which children communicate to one an-  
other their first experiences and the impressions which  
have surprised them. Then they fell asleep, in the midst  
of their discussion.

Early in the morning they were awakened. By their  
bedside stood the fat cook of the painters, and her face,  
which was always red, now, contrary to her wont, was gray  
and drawn.

“Why are you pampering yourselves?” she said hastily,  
making a rather peculiar noise with her thick, red lips.—  
“We've got the cholera in the court-yard. . . . The  
Lord has visited us!”—and she suddenly burst out crying.

“Akh, you're . . . lying, aren't you?” cried Grigóry.

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"And I never carried out the slop-bucket last night," said Matréna guiltily.

"My dear folks, I'm going to get my wages. I'm going away. . . . I'll go, and go . . . to the country," said the cook.

"Who's got it?" inquired Grigóry, getting out of bed.

"The accordeon-player! He's got it. . . . He drank water out of the fountain last evening, do you hear, and he was seized in the night. . . . And it took him right in the belly, my good people, as though he'd swallowed rat-poison . . ."

"The accordeon-player . . ." muttered Grigóry. He could not believe that any disease could overcome the accordeon-player. Such a jolly, dashing young fellow, and he had walked through the court like a peacock, as usual, only last night.—"I'll go and take a look,"—Orlóff decided, with an incredulous laugh.

Both women shrieked in affright:

"Grísha, why, it's catching!"

"What are you thinking of, my good man, where are you going?"

Grigóry uttered a violent oath, thrust his legs into his trousers, and dishevelled as he was, with shirt-collar unbuttoned, went toward the door. His wife clutched him by the shoulder, from behind, he felt her hands tremble, and suddenly flew into a rage, for some reason or other.

"I'll hit you in the snout! Get away!"—he roared, and went out, after striking his wife in the breast.

The court-yard was dark and deserted, and Grigóry, as he proceeded toward the accordeon-player's door, was simultaneously conscious of a chill of terror, and of a keen satisfaction at the fact that he, alone, out of all the denizens of the house, was going to the sick accordeon-player. This

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satisfaction was still further augmented when he perceived that the tailors were watching him from the second-story windows. He even began to whistle, wagging his head about with a dashing air. But a little disenchantment awaited him at the door of the accordion-player's little den, in the shape of Sénka Tchízhik.

Having opened the door half way, he had thrust his sharp nose into the crack thus formed, and as was his wont, was taking his observations, captivated to such a degree that he did not turn round until Orlóff pulled his ear.

"Just see how it has racked him, Uncle Grigóry," he said in a whisper, raising toward Orlóff his dirty little face, rendered still more peaked than usual by the impressions he had undergone.—"And it's just as though he had shrunk up and got disjointed with dryness—like a bad cask . . . by heaven!"

Orlóff, enveloped by the foul air, stood and listened in silence to Tchízhik, endeavoring to peer, with one eye, through the crack of the door as it hung ajar.

"How would it do to give him some water to drink, Uncle Grigóry?" suggested Tchízhik.

Orlóff glanced at the boy's face, which was excited almost to the point of a nervous tremor, and felt something resembling a burst of excitement within himself.

"Go along, fetch the water!" he ordered Tchízhik, and boldly flinging the door wide open, he halted on the threshold, shrinking back a little.

Athwart the mist in his eyes, Grigóry beheld Kislyakóff:—the accordion-player, dressed in his best, lay with his breast on the table, which he was clutching tightly with his hands, and his feet, in their lacquered boots, moved feebly over the wet floor.

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"Who is it?" he asked hoarsely and apathetically, as though his voice had faded, and lost all its color.

Grigóry recovered himself, and stepping cautiously over the floor, he advanced to him, trying to speak bravely and even jestingly.

"I, brother, Mítry Pávloff. . . . But what are you up to . . . did you overwork last night, pray?"—he surveyed Kislyakóff attentively and curiously, and did not recognize him.

The accordeon-player's face had grown peaked all over, his cheek-bones projected in two acute angles, his eyes, deeply sunken in his head, and surrounded by greenish spots, were frightfully immovable and turbid. The skin on his cheeks was of the hue which is seen on corpses in hot summer weather. It was a completely dead, horrible face, and only the slow movement of the jaws showed that it was still alive. Kislyakóff's motionless eyes stared long at Grigóry's face, and their dead gaze put the latter in a fright. Feeling his ribs with his hands, for some reason or other, Orlóff stood three paces distant from the sick man, and felt exactly as though someone were clutching him by the throat with a damp, cold hand,—were clutching him and slowly strangling him. And he wanted to get away, as speedily as possible, from this room, hitherto so bright and comfortable, but now impregnated with a suffocating odor of putrefaction, and with a strange chill.

"Well . . ." he was about to begin, preparatory to beating a retreat. But the accordeon-player's gray face began to move in a strange way, his lips, covered with a black efflorescence, parted, and he said with his toneless voice:

"I . . . am . . . dying . . ."

The profound indifference, the inexplicable apathy of

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his three words echoed in Orlóff's head and breast, like three dull blows. With a senseless grimace on his countenance, he turned toward the door, but Tchízhik came flying to meet him, all flushed and perspiring, with a pail in his hand.

"Here it is . . . from Spiridónoff's well . . . they wouldn't let me have it, the devils . . ."

He set the pail on the floor, rushed into a corner, reappeared, and handing a glass to Orlóff, continued to prattle:

"They say you've got the cholera. . . . I say, well, what of that? You'll have it too, . . . now it'll run the rounds, as it did in the suburbs . . .? Whack! he gave me such a bang on the head that I yelled!"

Orlóff took the glass, dipped up water from the pail, and swallowed it at one gulp. In his ears the dead words were ringing:

"I . . . am . . . dying . . ."

But Tchízhik hovered round him with swift darts, feeling himself thoroughly in his proper sphere.

"Give me a drink . . ." said the accordion-player, moving himself and the table about on the floor.

Tchízhik hopped up to him, and held a glass of water to his black lips. Grigóry, as he leaned against the wall by the door, listened, as in a dream, to the sick man noisily drawing in the water; then he heard Tchízhik propose that they should undress Kislyakóff, and put him to bed, then the voice of the painters' cook rang out. Her broad face, with an expression of terror and compassion, was gazing in from the court-yard through a window, and she said in a snivelling tone:

"You ought to give him lamp-black and rum: a tea-glass full—two spoonfuls of lamp-black, and fill it with rum to the brim."

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But some invisible person suggested olive-oil with the brine from cucumbers, and *aqua regia*.

Orlóff suddenly became conscious that the heavy, oppressive gloom within him was illuminated by some memory. He rubbed his brow hard, as though endeavoring to increase the brilliancy of the light, and all at once, he went swiftly thence, ran across the court-yard and disappeared down the street.

"Heavens! And the shoemaker has got it too! He's run off to the hospital,"—the cook commented upon his flight in a plaintively-shrill voice.

Matréna, who was standing beside her, gazed with widely opened eyes, and turning pale, she shook all over.

"You're mistaken," she said hoarsely, barely moving her white lips,—“Grigóry won't fall ill of that accursed sickness. . . . He won't yield to it . . .”

But the cook, howling wofully, had already disappeared somewhere, and five minutes later a cluster of neighbors and passers-by was muttering dully around the Petúnnikoff house. Over all faces the same, identical sentiments flitted in turn: excitement, which was succeeded by hopeless dejection, and something evil, which now and then made way for active audacity. Tchízhik kept flying back and forth between the court and the crowd, his bare feet twinkling, and reporting the course of events in the accordion-player's room.

The public, collected together in a dense knot, filled the dusty, malodorous air of the street with the dull hum of their talk, and from time to time a violent oath, launched at someone, broke forth from their midst,—an oath as malicious as it was lacking in sense.

"Look . . . that's Orlóff!"

Orlóff drove up to the gate on the box of a wagon with



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a white canvas cover which was driven by a surly man all clad in white, also. This man roared, in a dull bass voice:

“Get out of the way!”

And he drove straight at the people, who sprang aside in all directions at his shout.

The aspect of this wagon, and the shout of its driver, rather subdued the high-strung mood of the spectators,—all seemed to grow dark at once, and many went swiftly away.

In the track of the wagon, the student who had visited the Orlóffs made his appearance from somewhere or other. His cap had fallen back on the nape of his neck, the perspiration streamed down his forehead in large drops, he wore a long mantle, of dazzling whiteness, and the lower part of its front was decorated with a large round hole, with reddish edges, evidently just burned in some way.

“Well, Orlóff, where’s the sick man?”—he asked loudly, casting a sidelong glance at the public, which had assembled in a little niche by the gate, and had greeted his appearance with great ill-will, although they watched him not without curiosity.

Someone said, in a loud tone:

“Look at yourself . . . you’re just like a cook!”

Another voice, which was quieter and had a tinge of malice in it, made promises:

“Just wait . . . he’ll give you a treat!”

There was a joker in the crowd, as there always is.

“He’ll give you such soup that your belly will burst on the spot!”

A laugh rang out, though it was not merry, but obscured by a timorous suspicion, it was not lively, though faces cleared somewhat.

“See, they ain’t afraid of catching it themselves . . .

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what's the meaning of that?"—very significantly inquired a man with a strained face and a glance filled with concentrated wrath.

And under the influence of this question, the countenances of the public darkened again, and their murmurs became still duller . . .

"They're bringing him!"

"That Orlóff! Akh, the dog!"

"Isn't he afraid?"

"What's it to him? He's a drunkard . . ."

"Carefully, carefully, Orlóff! Lift his feet higher . . . so! Ready! Drive off, Piótr!" ordered the student. "Tell the doctor I shall be there soon. Well, sir, Mr. Orlóff, I request that you will help me to exterminate the infection here. . . . By the way, you will learn how to do it, in case of need. . . . Do you agree? Can you come?"

"I can," said Orlóff, casting a glance around him, and feeling a flood of pride rising within him.

"And so can I," announced Tchízhik.

He had escorted the mournful wagon through the gate, and returned just in the nick of time to offer his services. The student stared at him through his glasses.

"Who are you, hey?"

"Apprentice . . . to the house-painters . . ."

explained Tchízhik.

"And are you afraid of the cholera?"

"I?" asked Sénka in surprise.—"The idea! I'm . . . not afraid of anything!"

"Re-eally? That's clever! Now, see here, my friends."—The student seated himself on a cask which was lying on the ground, and rolling himself to and fro on it, he began to say that it was indispensably necessary that

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Orlóff and Tchízhik should give themselves a good washing.

They formed a group, which was soon joined by Matréna, smiling timidly. After her came the cook, wiping her wet eyes on her dirty apron. In a short time, several persons from among the spectators approached this group, as cautiously as cats approach sparrows. A small, dense ring of men, about ten in number, formed around the student, and this inspired him. Standing in the centre of these people, and briskly gesticulating, he began something in the nature of a lecture, which now awoke smiles on their faces, now aroused their concentrated attention, now keen distrust and sceptical grins.

"The principal point in all diseases is—cleanliness of the body, and of the air which you breathe, gentlemen,"—he assured his hearers.

"Oh Lord!" sighed the painters' cook loudly.—"One must pray to Saint Varvára the martyr to be delivered from sudden death . . ."

"Gentlemen live in the body and in the air, but still, they die too,"—remarked one of the audience.

Orlóff stood beside his wife, and gazed at the face of the student, pondering something deeply the while. Someone gave his shirt a tug, from one side.

"Uncle Grigóry!"—whispered Sénka Tchízhik, raising himself on tiptoe, his eyes sparkling, blazing like coals,—"now that Mítry Pávlovitch is going to die, and he hasn't any relatives . . . who'll get his accordeon?"

"Let me alone, you imp!" Orlóff warded him off.

Sénka stepped aside, and stared through the window of the accordeon-player's little room, searching for something in it with an eager glance.

"Lime, tar,"—the student enumerated loudly.

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On the evening of that restless day, when the Orlóffs sat down to drink tea, Matréna asked her husband, with curiosity:

“Where did you go with the student a little while ago?”

Grigóry looked into her face with eyes obscured by something, and different from usual, and, without replying, began to pour his tea from his glass into his saucer.

About mid-day, after he had finished scrubbing the accordion-player's rooms, Grigóry had gone off somewhere with the sanitary officer, had returned at three o'clock thoughtful and taciturn, had thrown himself down on the bed, and there he had lain, face upward, until tea-time, never uttering a single word all that time, although his wife had made many efforts to draw him into conversation. He even failed to swear at her for nagging him, and this, in itself, was strange, she was not used to it, and it provoked her.

With the instinct of a woman whose whole life is bound up in her husband, she began to suspect that her husband had become interested in something new, she was afraid of something, and therefore, was the more passionately desirous of knowing what that thing was.

“Perhaps you don't feel well, Grísha?”

Grigóry poured the last gulp of tea from his saucer into his mouth, wiped his mustache with his hand, pushed his empty glass over to his wife without haste, and knitting his brows, he said:

“I went with the student to the barracks . . . yes . . .”

“To the cholera barracks?” exclaimed Matréna, and tremblingly, with lowered voice, she asked: “are there many of them there?”

“Fifty-three persons, counting in our man . . .”

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“Well?”

“They’re recovering by the score. . . . They can walk. . . . Yellow, thin . . .”

“Are they cholera-patients too? They’re not, I suppose? . . . They’ve put some others in there, to justify themselves: as much as to say—‘look, we can cure!’”

“You’re a fool!” said Grigóry with decision, and his eyes flashed angrily.—“You’re all stupid folks! Lack of education and stupidity—that’s all! You’re enough to kill a man with your ignorance. . . . You can’t understand anything,”—he sharply moved toward him his glass freshly filled with tea, and fell silent.

“Where did *you* get so much education?”—inquired Matréna viciously, and sighed.

Her husband, paying not the slightest heed to her words, remained silent, thoughtful and morose. The samovár, which had burned out, drawled a squeaking melody, full of irritating tediousness, an odor of oil-paints, carbolic acid, and stirred-up cesspools floated through the windows from the court-yard. The semi-twilight, the screeching of the samovár, and the smells—everything in the room became densely merged with one another, forming around the Orlóffs a setting which resembled a nightmare, while the dark maw of the oven stared at the husband and wife exactly as though it felt itself called upon to swallow them when a convenient opportunity should present itself. The silence lasted for a long time. Husband and wife nibbled away at their sugar, rattled their crockery, swallowed their tea.\* Matréna sighed, Grigóry tapped the table with his finger.

\* By way of economizing, the peasants do not put sugar into their tea, but nibble at it, and thus sweeten their mouths, an inelegant and inconvenient, but highly satisfactory method of operation.—*Translator.*

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“You never saw such cleanliness as they have there!”—he suddenly began, irritably.—“All the attendants, down to the very last one—wear white. The sick people keep getting into the bath all the time. . . . They give them wine . . . six bottles and a half! As for the food—the very smell of it would make you feel full-fed. . . . Care, anxiety. . . . They treat them in a motherly way . . . and all the rest of it. . . . So they do. Please to understand: you live along upon the earth, and not even one devil would take the trouble to spit on you, much less call in now and then to inquire—what and how and, in general, . . . what your life is like, that is to say, whether it suits you, or whether it is the right sort for a man? Has he any means of breathing or not? But when you begin to die—they not only do not permit it, but even put themselves to expense. The barracks . . . wine . . . six bottles and a half! Haven’t people any sense? For the barracks and the wine cost a lot of money. Couldn’t that same money be used for improving life . . . a little every year?”

His wife made no attempt to understand his remarks, it was enough for her to feel that they were new, and thence to deduce, with absolute accuracy, that something new concerning her was also in progress in Grigóry’s mind. Convinced of this, she wished to learn, as promptly as possible, how all this concerned her. Fear was mingled with this desire, and hope, and a sort of hostility toward her husband.

“I suppose the people yonder know even more than you do,”—said she, when he had finished, and pursed up her lips in a sceptical way.

Grigóry shrugged his shoulders, cast a furtive glance at her, and then, after a pause, he began in a still more lofty tone:

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“Whether they know or not, that’s their business. But if I have to die, without having seen any sort of life, I can reason about that. Now see here, I’ll tell you this: I don’t want any more of this sort of thing—that is to say, I won’t consent to sit and wait for the cholera to come and seize hold of me. I won’t do it! Piótr Ivánovitch says: ‘go ahead, and meet it half way! Fate is against you—but you can oppose it,—who’ll get the upper hand? It’s war! That’s all there is to say about it. . . .’ So, what now? I’m going to enter the barracks as an orderly—and that’s the end of it! Understand? I’m going to walk straight into its maw.—You may swallow me, but I’ll make a play with my feet! . . . I shall not earn any the less there . . . twenty rubles a month for wages, and they may add a gratuity besides. . . . I may die? . . . that’s so, but I should die sooner here. And again, it’s a change in my life . . .” and the excited Orlóff banged the table so vehemently with his fist, that all the crockery bounced up and down with a clatter.

Matréna, at the beginning of her husband’s speech, had stared at him with an expression of uneasiness, but by the time he had finished, she had screwed up her eyes in a hostile manner.

“Did the student advise you to do that?” she asked staidly.

“I have wits of my own . . . I can judge,”—for some reason, Grigóry evaded a direct reply.

“Well, and did he advise you to separate from me?”—went on Matréna.

“From you?”—Grigóry was somewhat disconcerted—he had not yet succeeded in thinking out that matter. Of course, one can leave a woman in lodgings, as is generally done, but there are different sorts of women. Ma-

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tréna, was one of the dangerous sort. One must keep her directly under his eyes. Settling down on this thought, Orlóff went on with a scowl:—"The student . . . what ails you? You will live here . . . and I shall be earning wages . . . ye-es . . ."

"Just so,"—said the woman briefly and calmly, and laughed with that very significant and purely feminine smile, which is capable of evoking in a man thoughts of jealousy which pierce his heart.

Orlóff, who was nervous and quick of apprehension, felt this, but, being loath to betray himself, out of self-love, he flung at his wife the curt remark:

"Quack and grunt—make up all your speeches . . ."

and he pricked up his ears, in anticipation of what she would say.

But she smiled again, with that exasperating smile, and preserved silence.

"Well, how is it to be?" inquired Grigóry, in a lofty tone.

"How is what to be?" said Matréna, indifferently wiping the cups.

"Viper! None of your shiftiness—I'll damage you!" Orlóff boiled up.—"Perhaps I'm going to my death."

"I'm not sending you . . . don't go . . ." interrupted Matréna.

"You'd be glad to send me off, I know!" exclaimed Orlóff ironically.

She made no reply. Her silence enraged him, but he restrained himself from his customary expression of the feelings which such scenes called forth in him. He restrained himself under the influence of a very venomous thought, as it appeared to him, which flashed through his brain. He even gave vent to a malicious smile. "I know



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you'd like to have me tumble down even to the very depths of hell. Well, we shall see which of us comes off best . . . yes! I, also, can take such a course—akh, I've no patience with you!”

He sprang up from the table, snatched up his cap from the window-sill, and went off, leaving his wife dissatisfied with her policy, disconcerted by his threats, and with a growing feeling within her of alarm for the future. As she gazed out of the window, she whispered to herself:

“Oh Lord! Queen of Heaven! All-Holy Birth-Giver of God!”

Besieged by a throng of disquieting problems, she remained sitting, for a long time, at the table, endeavoring to foresee what Grigóry would do. Before her stood the cleanly-washed table appurtenances; and on the principal wall of the neighboring house opposite her windows, the setting sun cast a reddish spot; reflected from the white wall, it penetrated into the room, and the edge of the glass sugar-bowl which stood in front of Matréná glittered. She stared at this faint reflection, with contracted brow, until her eyes ached. Then, rising from her chair, she cleared away the dishes and lay down on the bed.

She felt disgusted.

Grigóry arrived when it was already entirely dark. From his very footsteps on the stairs she decided that he was in good spirits. He swore at the darkness in the room, called to his wife, approached the bed, and sat down on it. His wife raised herself, and sat beside him.

“Do you know I have something to tell you?”—asked Orlóff, laughing.

“Well, what is it?”

“You are going to take a position also!”

“Where?” she asked, with trembling voice.

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"In the same barracks with me!" announced Orloff triumphantly.

She threw her arms round his neck, and clasping him tightly, kissed him straight on the lips. He had not expected this, and thrust her away. She was pretending . . . she didn't want to be with him at all, rogue that she was! The viper was pretending, she regarded her husband as a fool . . .

"What are you delighted about?"—he asked roughly and suspiciously, conscious of a desire to hurl her to the floor.

"Because I am!" she replied, boldly.

"Pretence! I know you!"

"You're my Eruslán the Brave!" \*

"Stop that, I tell you . . . or look out for yourself!"

"You're my darling little Grísha!"

"Well, what's the matter with you, anyhow?"

When her caresses had tamed him a little, he asked her anxiously:

"But you're not afraid?"

"Why, we shall be together," she replied simply.

It pleased him to hear this. He said to her:

"You brave little creature!"

And, at the same time, he pinched her side so hard that she shrieked.

The first day of the Orlóffs' service in the hospital coincided with a very great influx of patients, and the two novices, accustomed, as they were, to their slowly-moving existence, felt worried and hampered in the midst of this seething activity which had seized them in its grasp. Awk-

\* The hero of a seventeenth century Russian fairy-tale, after the Persian tale of "Rustem."—*Translator*.

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ward, unable to comprehend orders, overwhelmed by impressions, they immediately lost their heads, and although they incessantly ran hither and thither, in the effort to work, they hindered others rather than accomplished anything themselves. Several times, Grigóry felt, with all his being, that he merited a stern shout or a scolding for his incompetence, but, to his great amazement, no one shouted at him.

When one of the doctors, a tall, black-mustached man, with a hooked nose, and a huge wart over his right eyebrow, ordered Grigóry to assist one of the patients to sit down in the bath-tub, Grigóry gripped the sick man under the arms with so much zeal that the man groaned and frowned.

"Don't break him to pieces, my dear fellow, he'll fit into the bath-tub whole, . . ." said the doctor seriously.

Orlóff was abashed; but the sick man, a long, gaunt fellow, laughed with all his might, and said hoarsely:

"He's new to it. . . . He doesn't know how."

Another doctor, an old man, with a pointed gray beard, and large, brilliant eyes, gave the Orlóffs instructions, when they reached the barracks, how to treat the patients, what to do in this case and that, how to handle the sick people in transferring them. In conclusion, he asked them whether they had been to the bath the day before, and gave them white aprons. This doctor's voice was soft, he spoke rapidly; he took a great liking to the married pair, but half an hour later they had forgotten all his instructions, overwhelmed with the stormy life of the barracks. All about them flitted people in white, orders were issued, caught on the fly by the orderlies, the sick people rattled in their throats, moaned and groaned, water flowed and splashed, and all these sounds floated on the air, which was

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so thickly saturated with penetrating odors that tickled the nostrils disagreeably, that it seemed as though every word of the doctors, every sigh of the patients, stunk also, and irritated the nose . . .

At first, it seemed to Orlóff that utterly restless chaos reigned there, wherein he could not possibly find his place, and that he would choke, grow deaf, fall ill. . . . But a few hours passed, and Grigóry, invaded by the breath of energy everywhere disseminated, pricked up his ears, and became permeated with a mighty desire to adjust himself to his business as speedily as possible, conscious that he would feel calmer and easier if he could turn in company with the rest.

“Corrosive sublimate!” shouted one doctor.

“More hot water in this bath-tub!”—commanded a scraggy little medical student, with red, inflamed eyelids.

“Here you . . . what’s your name? Orlóff . . . yes! rub his feet. . . . There, that’s the way . . . you understand. . . . So-o, so-o. . . . More lightly—you’ll take the skin off. . . . Oï, how tired I am . . .”

Another long-haired and pock-marked student gave Grigóry orders and showed him how to work.

“They’ve brought another patient!” the news passed from one to another.

“Orlóff, go and carry him in.”

Grigóry displayed great zeal—all covered with perspiration, dizzy, with dimmed eyes and a heavy darkness in his head. At times, the feeling of personal existence in him completely vanished under the pressure of the mass of impressions which he underwent every moment. The green spots under the clouded eyes on earth-colored faces, bones which seemed to have been sharpened by the dis-

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ease, the sticky, malodorous skin, the strange convulsions of the hardly living bodies—all this made his heart contract with grief, and caused a nausea which he could, with difficulty, control.

Several times, in the corridor of the barracks, he caught a fleeting glimpse of his wife; she had grown thin, and her face was gray and abstracted. He even managed to ask her, with a voice which had grown hoarse:

“Well, how goes it?”

She smiled faintly in reply, and silently disappeared.

A totally unaccustomed thought stung Grigóry: perhaps he had done wrong in forcing his wife to come hither, to such filthy work. She would fall ill of the infection. . . . And the next time he met her, he shouted at her severely:

“See to it that you wash your hands often . . . take care!”

“And what if I don’t?”—she asked, teasingly, displaying her small, white teeth.

This enraged him. A pretty place she had chosen for mirth, the fool! And how mean they were, those women! But he did not succeed in saying anything to her; catching his angry glance, Matréná went rapidly away to the women’s section.

And a minute later he was carrying his acquaintance the policeman to the dead-house. The policeman rocked gently to and fro on the stretcher, with his eyes fixed in a stare, from beneath contorted brows, on the clear, hot sky. Grigóry gazed at him with dull terror in his heart: The day before yesterday he had seen that policeman at his post, and had even sworn at him as he went past—they had some little accounts to settle between them. And now, here was this man, so healthy and malicious, lying dead, all disfigured, drawn up with convulsions.

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Orlóff felt that this was not right,—why should a man be born into the world at all, if he must die, in one day, of such a dirty disease? He gazed down upon the policeman from above, and pitied him. What would become of his children . . . three in all? The dead man had buried his wife a year ago, and had not yet succeeded in marrying for the second time.

He even ached, somewhere inside, with this pity. But, all at once, the clenched left hand of the corpse slowly moved and straightened itself out. At the same moment, the left side of the distorted mouth, which had been half open up to now, closed.

“Halt!”—shouted Orlóff hoarsely, setting the stretcher down on the ground.—“Be quick!”—he said in a whisper to the orderly who was carrying the corpse with him.

The latter turned round, cast a glance at the dead man, and said angrily to Orlóff:

“What are you lying for? Don’t you understand that he’s only putting himself in order for the coffin? You see how it has twisted him up? He can’t be put into the coffin like that. Hey there, carry him along!”

“Yes, but he is moving . . .” protested Orlóff.

“Carry him along, do you hear, you queer man! Don’t you understand words? I tell you: he’s putting himself in order,—well, that means that he’s moving. This ignorance of yours may lead you into sin, if you don’t look out. . . . Look lively there! Can a man make such speeches about a dead body? That signifies a riot, brother . . . that’s what it is! Understand? In other words, hold your tongue, and don’t utter a syllable to anyone about his moving,—they’re all like that. Otherwise, the sow will tell it to the boar-pig, and the boar will tell it to the whole town, well, and the result will be a riot—

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‘they’re burying people alive!’ The populace will come here, and tear us in bits. There’ll be about enough of you left for a breakfast-roll.\* Understand? Shunt him here, on the left.”

Prónin’s calm voice and leisurely gait had a sobering effect upon Grigóry.

“Only don’t let your spirits sink, my good fellow—you’ll get used to it. We’re well off here. Victuals, treatment and all the rest—everything is just as it should be. We shall all be corpses, my boy; it’s the commonest thing in life. And, in the meanwhile, brisk up, you know, and only don’t get scared—that’s the chief thing! Do you drink vódka?”

“Yes,” replied Orlóff.

“Well then. Yonder in the ditch I have a little bottle, in case of need. Come and let’s swallow a little of it.”

They went to the pit, round the corner of the barracks, took a drink, and Prónin, pouring some drops of mint on sugar, gave it to Orlóff, with the words:

“Eat that, otherwise you’ll smell of vódka. They’re strict here about vódka. For it’s injurious to drink it, they say.”

“And have you got used to things here?” Grigóry asked him.

“I should think so! I’ve been here from the start. A lot of folks have died here since I’ve been here—hundreds, to speak plainly. It’s an uneasy life, but a good life here, to tell the truth. It’s a pious work. Like the ambulance-corps in time of war . . . you’ve heard about the ambulance-corps and the sisters of mercy? I watched them during the Turkish campaign. I was at

\* A kalátch—a delicious and favorite form of bread, particularly good in Moscow.—*Translator.*

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Adragan and Kars. Well, my boy, they're purer than we are, we soldiers and people in general. We fight, we have guns, bullets, bayonets; but they—they walk about without any weapons, as though they were in a green garden. They pick up our men, or a Turk, and carry them to the field-hospital. And around them . . . zh-zhee! ti-iu! fi-it! Sometimes the poor ambulance man gets it in the neck—tchik! . . . and that's the end of him! . . .”

After this conversation, and a good swallow of vódka, Orlóff plucked up a little courage.

“You've put your hand to the rope, don't say it's too thick,”—he exhorted himself, as he rubbed a sick man's legs. Someone behind him entreated piteously, in a moaning voice:

“A dri-ink! Oï, my dear fellow!”

And someone gabbled:

“Oho-ho-ho! Hotter! Mis-mister doctor, it relieves me! Christ reward you,—I can feel! Permit him to pour in some more boiling water!”

“Give him some wine!” shouted Doctor Vášhtchenko.

Orlóff worked away, lending an attentive ear to what went on around him, and found that, as a matter of fact, everything was not so nasty and strange as it had seemed to him a little while before, and that chaos did not reign, but a great and intelligent power was acting regularly. But he shuddered, nevertheless, when he recalled the policeman, and cast a furtive glance through the window of the barracks into the yard. He believed that the policeman was dead, but still there was an element of wavering in this belief. Wouldn't the man suddenly spring up and shout? And he remembered that he seemed to have heard someone tell: that one day, somewhere or other, people who had died of the cholera leaped out of their coffins and ran away.



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As Orlóff ran to and fro in the barracks, now rubbing one patient, now placing another in the bath-tub, he felt exactly as though gruel were boiling in his brain. He recalled his wife: how was she getting on yonder? Sometimes with this recollection mingled a transitory desire to steal a minute to have a look at Matréna. But after this, Orlóff felt, somehow, disconcerted at his desire, and exclaimed to himself:

“Come, bustle about, you fatmeated woman! You’ll dry up, never fear. . . . You’ll get rid of your intentions . . . .”

He had always suspected that his wife cherished, in her heart of hearts, intentions very insulting to him as a husband, and now and then, when he rose in his suspicions to a sort of objectiveness, he even admitted that there was some foundation for these intentions. Her life, also, was tinged with yellow, and all sorts of trash creeps into one’s head with such a life. This objectiveness was generally converted into certainty during the period of his suspicions. Then he would ask himself: why had he found it necessary to crawl out of his cellar into this boiling cauldron?—and he wondered at himself. But all these thoughts worked round and round, somewhere deep within him, and were fenced off, as it were, from the direct line of his work by the strained attention which he devoted to the actions of the medical staff. Never, in any sort of labor, had he beheld men wear themselves out, as the men did here, and he reflected, more than once, as he surveyed the exhausted faces of the doctors and students, that all these men really did not get paid for doing nothing!

When relieved from duty, hardly able to stand on his feet, Orlóff went out into the court-yard of the barracks, and lay down against its wall, under the window of the

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apothecary's shop. There was a ringing in his head, there was a pain under his shoulder-blades, and his legs ached with the gnawing pangs of fatigue. He no longer thought of anything, or wanted anything, he simply stretched himself out on the sod, stared at the sky, in which hung magnificent clouds, richly adorned with the rays of sunset, and fell into a sleep like death.

He dreamed that he and his wife were the guests of Doctor Vášhtchenko in a huge room, with rows of Vienna chairs ranged around the walls. On the chairs all the patients from the barracks were sitting. The doctor and Matréna were executing the "Russian Dance" in the middle of the hall, while he himself was playing the accordion and laughing heartily, because the doctor's long legs would not bend at all, and the doctor, a very grave and pompous man, was stalking about the hall after Matréna exactly as a heron stalks over a marsh.

All at once the policeman made his appearance in the doorway.

"Aha!" he exclaimed saturninely and menacingly.— "Did you think, Grishka, that I was completely dead? You're playing the accordeon, but you dragged me out to the dead-house! Come along with me, now! Get up!"

Seized with a fit of trembling, all bathed in perspiration, Orlóff raised himself quickly and sat on the ground. Opposite, was squatting Doctor Vášhtchenko, who said to him reproachfully:

"What sort of an ambulance nurse are you, my friend, if you go to sleep on the ground, and lie down on it upon your belly, to boot, hey? Now, you'll take cold in your bowels,—you'll take to your cot, and the first you know, you'll die. . . . It's not right, my friend,—you have a place in the barracks to sleep. Why didn't they tell you

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so? Besides, you are in a perspiration, and have a chill. Come along with me, now, I'll give you something."

"I was so tired, . . ." muttered Orlóff.

"So much the worse. You must take care of yourself—it is a dangerous time, and you are a valuable man."

Orlóff followed the doctor in silence along the corridor of the barracks, in silence drank some sort of medicine out of a wine-glass, drank something more out of another, frowned and spat.

"Come, go and have a sleep now. . . . Farewell for a while!" and the doctor began to move his long, slender feet over the floor of the corridor.

Orlóff looked after him, and suddenly ran after him, with a broad smile.

"I thank you humbly, doctor."

"What for?" and the doctor halted.

"For the work. Now I shall try with all my might to please you! Because your anxiety is agreeable to me . . . and . . . you said I was a valuable man . . . and, altogether, I'm most si-sincerely grateful to you!"

The doctor gazed intently and in surprise at the agitated face of his hospital orderly, and smiled also.

"You're a queer fellow! However, never mind,—you'll turn out splendidly . . . genuine. Go ahead, and do your best; it will not be for me, but for the patients. We must wrest a man from the disease, tear him out of its paws,—do you understand me? Well, then, go ahead and try your best to conquer the disease. And, in the meanwhile—go and sleep!"

Orlóff was soon lying on his cot, and fell asleep with a pleasing sensation of warmth in his bowels. He felt joyful, and was proud of his very simple conversation with the doctor.

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But he sank into slumber regretting that his wife had not heard that conversation. He must tell her to-morrow. . . . That devil's pepper-pot would not believe it, in all probability.

"Come and drink your tea, Grísha," his wife woke him in the morning.

He raised his head, and looked at her. She smiled at him. She was so calm and fresh, with her hair smoothly brushed, and clad in her white slip.

It pleased him to see her thus, and, at the same time, he reflected that the other men in the barracks certainly must see her in the same light.

"What do you mean—what tea? I have my own tea;—where am I to go?" he asked gloomily.

"Come and drink it with me,"—she proposed, gazing at him with caressing eyes.

Grigóry turned his eyes aside and said, curtly, that he would go.

She went away, but he lay down on his cot again, and began to think.

"What a woman! She invites me to drink tea, she's affectionate. . . . But she has grown thin in one day." He felt sorry for her, and wanted to do something which would please her. Should he buy something sweet to eat with the tea? But while he was washing himself he rejected that idea,—why pamper the woman? Let her live as she is!

They drank tea in a bright little den with two windows, which looked out on the plain, all flooded with the golden radiance of the morning sun. On the grass, under the windows, the dew was still glistening, far away on the horizon in the nebulous rose-colored morning mist stood

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the trees along the highway. The sky was clear, and the fragrance of damp grass and earth floated in through the windows from the meadows.

The table stood against the wall between the windows, and at it sat three persons: Grigóry and Matréná with the latter's companion,—a tall, thin, elderly woman, with a pock-marked face, and kindly gray eyes. They called her Felitzáta Egórovna; she was unmarried, the daughter of a Collegiate Assessor, and could not drink tea made with water from the hospital boiler, but always boiled her own samovár. As she explained all this to Orlóff, in a cracked voice, she hospitably suggested that he should sit by the window, and drink his fill of "the really heavenly air," and then she disappeared somewhere.

"Well, did you get tired yesterday?" Orlóff asked his wife.

"Just frightfully tired!" replied Matréná with animation.—"I could hardly stand on my feet, my head reeled, I couldn't understand what was said to me, and the first I knew, I was lying at full length on the floor, unconscious. I barely—barely held out until relief-time came. . . . I kept praying; 'help, oh Lord,' I thought."

"And are you scared?"

"Of the sick people?"

"The sick people are nothing."

"I'm afraid of the dead people. Do you know . . ."

she bent over to her husband, and whispered to him in affright:—"they move after they are dead. . . . God is my witness, they do!"

"I've se-een that!"—laughed Grigóry sceptically.—"Yesterday, Nazároff the policeman came near giving me a box on the ear after his death. I was carrying him to the dead-house, and he gave su-uch a flourish with his

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left hand . . . I hardly managed to get out of the way . . . so there now!"—He was not telling the strict truth, but it seemed to come out that way of itself, against his will.

He was greatly pleased at this tea-drinking in the bright, clean room, with windows opening on a boundless expanse of green plain and blue sky. And something else pleased him, also,—not exactly his wife, nor yet himself. The result of it all was that he wished to show his best side, to be the hero of the day which was just beginning.

"When I start in to work—even the sky will become hot, so it will! For there is a cause for my doing so. In the first place, there are the people here,—there aren't any more like them on earth, I can tell you that!"

He narrated his conversation with the doctor, and as he again exerted his fancy, unconsciously to himself—this fact still further strengthened his mood.

"In the second place, there's the work itself. It's a great affair, my friend, in the nature of war, for example. The cholera and people—which is to get the better of the other? Brains are needed, and everything must be just so. What's cholera? One must understand that, and then—go ahead and give it what it can't endure! Doctor Vášhtchenko says to me: 'you're a valuable man in this matter, Orlóff,' says he. 'Don't get scared,' says he; 'and drive it up from the patient's legs into his belly, and there,' says he, 'I'll nip it with something sour. That's the end of it, and the man lives, and ought to be eternally grateful to you and me, because who was it that took him away from death? We!'"—And Orlóff proudly inflated his chest as he gazed at his wife with kindling eyes.

She smiled pensively into his face; he was handsome, and bore a great resemblance to his old self, the Grisha

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whom she had seen some time, long ago, before their marriage.

"All of them in our division are just such hard-working, kind folks. The woman doctor, a fa-at woman with spectacles, and then the female medical students. They're nice people, they talk to a body so simply, and you can understand everything they say."

"So that signifies that you're all right, satisfied?"—asked Grigóry, whose excitement had somewhat cooled off.

"Do you mean me? Oh Lord! Judge for yourself: I get twelve rubles, and you get twenty . . . that makes thirty-eight a month!\* We're lodged and fed! That means, that if people keep on getting sick until the winter, how much shall we amass? . . . And then, God willing, we'll raise ourselves out of that cellar . . ."

"We-ell now, that's a serious subject . . ." said Orlóff thoughtfully and, after a pause, he exclaimed with the pathos of hope, as he slapped his wife on the shoulder:—"Ekh, Matrénka,† isn't the sun shining on us? Don't get scared, now!"

She flushed all over.

"If you'd only stop drinking . . ."

"As to that—hold your tongue! Suit your awl to your leather, your phiz to your life. . . . With a different life, my conduct will be different."

"Oh Lord, if that might only happen!"—sighed his wife profoundly.

"Well now, hush up!"

"Gríshenka!" ‡

\* A little less than half that amount in dollars.—*Translator.*

† Another diminutive of Matrénka.—*Translator.*

‡ A third variation (*Grísha, Gríshka*), of Grigóry, in the diminutive.—*Translator.*

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They parted with certain novel feelings toward each other, inspired by hope, ready to work until their strength gave out, alert and cheerful.

Two or three days passed, and Orlóff had already won several flattering mentions as a sagacious, smart young fellow, and along with this he observed that Prónin and the other orderlies in the barracks bore themselves toward him with envy, and a desire to make things unpleasant for him. He was on his guard, and he also imbibed wrath against fat-faced Prónin, with whom he had been inclined to strike up a friendship and to chat, "according to his soul." At the same time, he was embittered by the plain desire of his fellow-workers to do him some injury.—"Ekh, the rascals!" he exclaimed to himself, and quietly gritted his teeth, endeavoring not to let slip some convenient opportunity to pay his friends off "with as good as they gave." And, involuntarily, his thought halted at his wife:—with her he could talk about everything, she would not be envious of his successes, and would not burn his boots with carbolic acid, as Prónin had done.

All the working-days were as stormy and seething with activity as the first had been, but Grigóry no longer became so fatigued, for he expended his strength with more discernment with every day that passed. He learned to distinguish the smell of the medicaments, and, picking out from among them the odor of sulphate of ether, he inhaled it with delight on the sly, when opportunity offered, finding that the inhalation of ether had almost as agreeable an action as a good glass of vódka. Catching the meaning of the medical staff at half a word, always amiable and talkative, understanding how to entertain the patients, he became more and more of a favorite with the doctors and the medical students, and thus, under the com-



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bined influence of all the impressions of his new mode of existence, a strange, exalted mood was formed within him. He felt himself to be a man of special qualities. In him beat the desire to do something which should attract to him the attention of everyone, should astonish everyone, and force them to the conviction that he had a right to the ambition which had elevated him to such a pitch in his own eyes. This was the singular ambition of the man who had suddenly realized that he was a man, and who, as it were, still not quite firmly assured of the fact, wished to confirm it, in some way, to himself and to others; this was ambition, gradually transformed into a thirst for some disinterested exploit.

As the result of this incentive, Orlóff performed various risky feats, such as straining himself by carrying a heavily-built patient from his cot to the bath-tub single-handed, without waiting for assistance from his fellow-orderlies, nursing the very dirtiest of the patients, behaving in a daring sort of way in regard to the possibility of contagion, and handling the dead with a simplicity which sometimes passed over into cynicism. But all this did not satisfy him; he longed for something on a greater scale, and this longing burned incessantly within him, tortured him, and, at last, drove him to anguish.

Then he poured out his soul to his wife, because he had no one else.

One evening, when he and his wife were relieved from duty, they went out into the fields, after they had drunk tea. The barracks stood far away from the town, in the middle of a long, green plain, bounded on one side by a dark strip of forest, on the other by the line of buildings in the town; on the north the plain extended into the far distance, and there its verdure became merged with the

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dull-blue horizon; on the south it was intersected by a precipitous descent to the river, and along the verge of this precipice ran the highway, along which, at equal distances one from another, stood aged, wide-spreading trees. The sun was setting, and the crosses on the churches of the town, rising above the dark-green of the gardens, flamed in the sky, reflecting sheaves of golden rays, and on the window-panes of the houses which lay on the edge of the town the red glow of the sunset was reflected also. A band of music was playing somewhere or other; from the ravine, thickly overgrown with a fir-grove, a resinous fragrance was wafted aloft; the forest, also, shed abroad on the air its complicated, succulent perfume; light, fragrant waves of warm wind floated caressingly toward the town, and in the wide, deserted plain everything was very delightful, quiet and sweetly-melancholy.

The Orlóffs walked across the grass in silence, with pleasure inhaling the pure air in place of the hospital odors.

"Where's that band playing, in the town, or in the camp?" inquired Matréna softly, of her pensive husband.

She did not like to see him thoughtful—he seemed a stranger to her, and far away from her at such moments. Of late, they had chanced to be together so very little, and she prized these moments all the more.

"The band?"—Grigóry replied with another question, as though freeing himself from a dream.—"Well, the devil take that band! You just ought to hear the music in my soul . . . that's something like!"

"What is it?" she asked tremulously, looking into his eyes.

"I don't know. . . . That is, I can't tell you . . . and even if I could would you be able to understand? My

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soul burns. . . . It pines for space . . . so that I might develop myself to my full strength. . . . Ekhma! I feel within myself invincible strength! That is to say, if this cholera, for instance, could be transformed into a man . . . into an epic hero . . . even Ilyá of Muróm himself; \*—I'd grapple with it; 'Come on, I'll fight thee to the death! Thou art a power, and I, Gríshka Orlóff, am a power also,—now, let's see who'll get the best of the other?' And I'd strangle it, even if it killed me too. . . . There'd be a cross over me in the field, with the inscription: 'Grigóry Andréeff Orlóff. . . . He freed Russia from the cholera.' Nothing more would be necessary."

As he spoke, his face burned, and his eyes flashed.

"You're my strong man!" whispered Matréná, nestling close to his side.

"Do you understand . . . I'd hurl myself on a hundred knives, if only it would be of any use! If life could be lightened in that way. Because I see people: Doctor Vášhtchenko, student Khokhryakóff,—it's wonderful how they work! They ought to have died long ago of fatigue. . . . Do you think they do it for money? A man can't work like that for money! The doctors, thank the Lord! have something of their own, and get a little in addition. . . . Why, an old man fell ill lately, and so Doctor Vášhtchenko hammered away at him for four days, and never went home once the whole time. . . . Money doesn't count in such a case; pity is the cause. He's sorry for people—well, and so he doesn't spare himself . . . for whose sake, you ask? For

\* For Ilyá of Muróm and the other famous epic heroes (*bogatyry*) see: "The Epic Songs of Russia," by Isabel F. Hapgood. Charles Scribner's Sons.

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everybody's sake . . . for the sake of Míshka Úsoff,  
. . . Míshka's proper place is in jail, for everybody  
knows that Míshka is a thief, and, perhaps, even worse.  
. . . They're curing Míshka. . . And they were  
glad when he got up from his cot, they laughed. . .  
So I want to feel that same joy, also . . . and to have  
a great deal of it. . . I'd like to choke with it! Be-  
cause it gives me the heart-ache to see how they laugh  
over their work. I ache all over, and catch fire. I will  
do something! . . . But how? Oh . . . the devil!"

Orlóff waved his hand hopelessly, and again fell into  
thought.

Matréna said nothing, but her heart beat anxiously—  
this excitement of her husband alarmed her, and in his  
words she plainly felt the great passion of his longing,  
which she did not understand, because she did not try to  
understand it. It was her husband, not a hero, who was  
dear and necessary to her.

They reached the verge of the precipice, and sat down,  
side by side. . . . The tufted crests of the young  
birch-trees looked down upon them, and in the bottom  
of the ravine there already lay a bluish mist, which sent  
forth an odor of dampness, rotting leaves and pine-needles.  
From time to time a puff of wind swept along the ravine,  
the branches of the birch-trees, the little fir-trees, rocked,  
rocked to and fro,—the whole ravine became filled with  
anxious, timorous whispering, and it seemed as though  
someone who was tenderly beloved and guarded by the  
trees had fallen asleep in the ravine, beneath their canopy,  
and they were whispering together about him very, very  
softly, in order not to awaken him. And in the town,  
lights shone forth, and stood out like reddish flowers  
against the dark background of its gardens. And in the

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sky the stars began to kindle their fires. The Orlóffs sat on in silence,—he thoughtfully drummed on his knee with his fingers, she gazed at him and sighed softly.

And suddenly clasping her arms about his neck, she laid her head on his breast, and said in a whisper:

“My darling Gríshka! My dear one! How good you have become to me once more, my brave man! You see, it seems as though it were the good time . . . after our wedding, . . . you and I were living along . . . you never utter an unkind word to me, you are always talking with me, you open your soul to me . . . you don't bawl at me.”

“And have you been fretting over that? I'll give you a thrashing, if you want it,”—jested Grigóry affectionately, feeling in his soul an influx of tenderness and pity for his wife.

He began softly to stroke her head with his hand, and this caress pleased him,—it was so paternal—the caress of a father for a grown-up child. Matréná did in fact resemble a child: she now climbed up on his knees, and seated herself in his lap, in a soft, warm little ball.

“My dear one!”—she whispered.

He heaved a profound sigh, and words which were new both to his wife and to himself flowed of themselves from his tongue.

“Eh, you poor little kitten! You're affectionate . . . you see, anyway, and there is no friend nearer than a husband. But you have kept waiting your chance on one side. . . . You know, if I did hurt you sometimes, it was because I was sad, Mótrya. We lived in a pit. . . . We did not see the light, we hardly knew people at all. I've got out of the pit, and have recovered my sight. I was like a blind man as regards life. And

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now I understand that a wife, anyhow, is a man's closest friend in life. Because people are snakes and reptiles, to tell the truth. . . . They're always trying to deal wounds to other people. . . . For instance—Prónin, Vasiukóff. . . . Well, they may go to the. . . . Hold your peace, Mótrya! We shall get straightened out, all right, never fear. . . . We shall make our way, and live with understanding. . . . Well? What do you think of it, my little goose?"

She shed sweet tears of happiness, and replied to his question with kisses.

"You are my only one!" he whispered, and kissed her in return.

They wiped away each other's tears with kisses, and both were conscious of their briny taste. And for a long time Orlóff continued to talk in words which were new for him.

It was completely dark now. The sky, magnificently adorned with countless swarms of stars, looked down upon the earth with triumphant sadness, and in the plain reigned silence like that of the sky.

They had got into the habit of drinking tea together. On the morning after their talk in the fields, Orlóff presented himself in his wife's room confused and surly over something. Felitzáta was not feeling well, Matréna was alone in the room, and greeted her husband with a beaming face, which immediately clouded over, and she asked him anxiously:

"What makes you like that? Are you ill?"

"No, never mind,"—he replied curtly, as he seated himself on a chair, and drew toward him the tea which she had already poured out.

"But what is it?" persisted Matréna.

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"I didn't sleep. I kept thinking. . . . You and I cackled together pretty hard last night, and got silly-soft . . . and now I'm ashamed of myself. . . . There's no use in that. You women always try to get a man into your hands, on such occasions . . . so you do. . . . Only, don't you dream of such a thing—you won't succeed. . . . You can't get around me, and I won't yield to you. . . . So now you know it!"

He said all this very impressively, but did not look at his wife. Matréná never took her eyes from his face all the time, and her lips writhed strangely.

"Are you sorry that you came so near to me last night—is that it?"—she asked quietly.—"Are you sorry that you kissed and caressed me? What does this mean? It insults me to hear it . . . it is very bitter, you're breaking my heart with such speeches. What do you want? Do you find me tiresome, am not I dear to you, or what?"

She gazed at him suspiciously, but in her tone resounded pain and a challenge to her husband.

"N—no . . . " said Grigóry abashed, "I was only talking in general. . . . You and I used to live in a hole, you know yourself what sort of a life it was! It makes me sick even to think of it. And now that we've got out of it—I feel afraid of something. Everything changed so suddenly. . . . I'm like a stranger to myself, and you seem to be a different person too. What is the meaning of this! And what will come next?"

"What God sends, Grísha!"—said Matréná gravely.—"Only don't feel sorry that you were kind last night."

"All right, drop it. . . ." Grigóry stopped her as abashed as ever, and still sighing.—"You see, I'm thinking that we shan't come to anything, after all. And our former life was not flowery, and my present life is not to my

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taste. And although I don't drink, don't beat you, and don't swear. . . ."

Matréna laughed convulsively.

"You have no time to worry about that now."

"I could always find time to get drunk,"—smiled Orlóff. "I don't feel tempted to —: that's the wonder. And besides, in general, I feel . . . not exactly ashamed of it, and yet not exactly afraid of it . . ." he shook his head, and began to meditate.

"The Lord only knows what is the matter with you," said Matréna, with a heavy sigh.—"It's a pleasant life, though there's a lot of work; all the doctors are fond of you, and you are behaving well . . . really, I don't know what to make of it. You're very uneasy."

"That's true, I'm uneasy. . . . Now, I was thinking in the night: Piótr Ivánovitch says: all men are equals, and ain't I a man like the rest? Yet Doctor Váshtchenko is better than I am, and Piótr Ivánovitch is better, and so are many others. . . . That means, that they are not my equals . . . and I'm not on a level with them, I feel that. . . . They cured Míshka Úsoff, and rejoiced at it. . . . And I don't understand that. On the whole, why feel glad that a man has recovered? His life was worse than the cholera convulsions, if you speak the truth. They understand that, but they are glad. . . . And I would have liked to rejoice too, like them, only I can't. . . . Because—as I said before . . . what is there to be glad about?"

"But they pity the people,"—returned Matréna,—  
"okh, how they pity them! It's the same thing in our section . . . a sick woman begins to mend, and, oh, Lord, what goings on! And when a poor woman gets her discharge, they give her advice, and money and medicines.



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. . . It even makes me shed tears . . . the kind people, the compassionate people!”

“Now you say—tears. . . . But I’m seized with amazement. . . . Nothing less. . . .” Orlóff shrugged his shoulders, and rubbed his head, and stared in wonder at his wife.

Eloquence made its appearance in her, from somewhere, and she began zealously to demonstrate to her husband, that people are entirely worthy of compassion. Bending toward him, and gazing into his face with affectionate eyes, she talked long to him about people, and the burden of life, and he stared at her and thought:

“Eh, how she talks! Where does she get the words?”

“For you are compassionate yourself—you say, you would strangle the cholera, if you had the power. But what for? Whom does it annoy? People, not you: you have even begun to live better because it made its appearance.”

Orlóff suddenly burst out laughing.

“Why, that’s so, certainly!—I am better off, that’s true, isn’t it? Akh, you shrewd creature,—make the most of it! People die, and I live better in consequence, hey?—That’s what life is like! Pshaw!”

He rose, and went away, laughing, to his duty. As he was walking along the corridor, he suddenly felt regret that no one except himself had heard Matréná’s speech. “She spoke cleverly! A woman, a woman, and yet she understands something, too.” And absorbed in an agreeable sort of sensation, he entered his ward, greeted by the hoarse rattling and the moans of the sick men.

With every passing day, the world of his feelings grew wider and wider, and, along with this, his necessity for speech waxed greater. He could not, of course, narrate as

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a whole what was taking place within him, for the greater part of his sensations and thought were beyond his grasp. An angry envy blazed up within him, because he could not rejoice over people.

It was after this that the desire was kindled within him to perform some wonderful deed, and astonish everyone thereby. He felt conscious that his position in the barracks placed him between people, as it were: the doctors and students were higher than he, the servitors were lower,—what was he himself? And a sense of loneliness laid its grasp upon him; then it seemed to him that Fate was playing with him, had blown him out of his place, and was now carrying him through the air like a feather. He began to feel sorry for himself, and went to his wife. Sometimes he did not wish to do this, considering that frankness toward her would lower him in her eyes, but he went, nevertheless. He arrived gloomy, and now in a vicious, again in a sceptical mood, he went away, almost always, petted and composed. His wife had words of her own; they were not many, they were simple, but there was always a great deal of feeling in them, and he observed, with astonishment, that Matréná was coming to occupy a larger and larger place in his life, that he had to think of her and talk with her “according to the soul,” more and more frequently.

She in her turn understood this very well, indeed, and endeavored, in every way, to broaden her growing significance in his life. Her toilsome and energetic life in the barracks had increased her sense of her own value greatly,—it came to pass unnoticed by Matréná. She did not think, she did not reason, but when she recalled her former life, in the cellar, in the narrow circle of cares for her husband and her housekeeping, she involuntarily compared the past with the present, and the gloomy picture of the cellar-existence

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gradually retreated further and further from her. The authorities at the barracks liked her; because of her intelligence, and knowledge of how to work, they all treated her graciously, they all saw in her an individual; and this was new for her, it gave her animation.

One day when she was on night-duty, the fat woman-doctor began to question her about her life, and Matréná, as she was willingly and frankly telling her about her life, suddenly paused and smiled.

“What are you laughing at?” asked the doctor.

“Why nothing. . . . I lived very badly . . . and, you see, if you will believe it, my dear madam,—I did not understand it . . . up to this very moment, I never understood how badly.”

After this glance into the past, a strange feeling took form in Mrs. Orlóff's breast toward her husband, she loved him exactly as much as before—with the blind love of the female, but it began to seem to her as though Grigóry were her debtor. At times, when she was talking with him, she assumed a patronizing tone, for he often inspired her with pity by his uneasy speeches. But, nevertheless, she was sometimes seized with doubt as to the possibility of a quiet and peaceful life with her husband, although, on the whole, she still believed that Grigóry would become steady, and that this melancholy would be extinguished in him.

They were fatally bound to grow nearer to each other, and—both were young, fit for work, strong—they might have gone on and lived out their days in the gray life of half-fed poverty, a life of exploiting others, to the end completely absorbed in the pursuit of the kopék, but they had been saved from this end by what Gríshka called his “uneasiness in the heart,” and was, in its essence, unable to reconcile itself with every-day things.

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On the morning of a gloomy September day a wagon drove into the court-yard of the barracks, and Prónin took out of it a little boy, all streaked with paints, bony, yellow, hardly breathing.

“From the Petúnnikoff house, in Damp street, again,” the driver reported, in answer to the query, whence the patient came.

“Tchízhik!”—exclaimed Orlóff, in distress,—“akh, oh, Lord! Sénka! Tchízh!\* Do you know me?”

“Y—yes, I know you . . .” said Tchízhik, with an effort, as he lay on the stretcher, and slowly rolled his eyes up under his brow, in order to see Orlóff, who was walking at his head, and bending over him.

“Akh . . . what a merry bird you were! How did you come to give up?”—asked Orlóff. He was, somehow, strangely alarmed at the sight of that dirty little boy, in the throes of the disease.—“Why did it seize on this poor little boy?” he embodied in one question all his sensations, and sadly shook his head.

Tchízhik made no reply, and shrugged his shoulders.

“I’m cold,” said he, when they laid him on a cot, and began to remove his rags, streaked all over with every sort of paint-color.

“Now, we’re going to put you into hot water immediately . . .” promised Orlóff.—“And we’ll cure you.”

Tchízhik shook his little head, and whispered:

“You can’t cure me. . . . Uncle Grigóry . . . bend down your . . . ear. I stole the accordeon. . . . It’s in the wood-shed . . . Day before yesterday I touched it, for the first time since I stole it. Akh, what an accordeon it is! I hid it . . . and then my

\* *Tchízh* means—a canary-bird. *Tchízhik*—a little canary-bird.—  
*Translator.*

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belly began to ache. . . . So. . . . That means, that this is for my sin. . . . It's hanging on the wall, under the stairs . . . and I piled wood up over it. . . . So. . . . Uncle Grigory . . . give it. . . . The accordion-player had a sister. . . . She asked about it. . . . Gi-ive it . . . to . . . her! . . .” He began to groan, and to writhe in convulsions.

They did everything they could for him, but the gaunt, exhausted little body would not retain life in it, and in the evening, Orlóff carried him on the stretcher to the dead-house. As he carried him, he felt exactly as though he had been wronged.

In the dead-house, Orlóff tried to straighten out Tchízhik's body, but he did not succeed. Orlóff went away overwhelmed, mournful, bearing with him the image of the merry lad distorted with the disease.

He was seized with a debilitating consciousness of his powerlessness in the face of death, and his ignorance of it. Despite all the pains he had taken over Tchízhik, despite the zealous labors of the doctors, . . . the boy had died! This was outrageous. . . . It would seize upon him, Orlóff, one of these days, and twist him up in convulsions. . . . And that would be the end of him. He grew frightened, and, along with this feeling, he was invaded by a sense of loneliness. He wanted to discuss all this with some clever man. More than once, he tried to strike up a comprehensive conversation with one or another of the students, but no one had any time for philosophy, and Grigory's attempts were not crowned with success. He was obliged to go to his wife, and talk with her. So he went to her, morose and sad.

She had only just come off duty, and was washing her-

## Orlóff and His Wife

self in the corner of the room, but the samovár was already standing on the table, filling the air with steam and hissing.

Grigóry seated himself, in silence, at the table, and began to gaze at his wife's bare, plump shoulders. The samovár bubbled away, splashing water over; Matréná snorted; orderlies ran swiftly back and forth along the corridor, and Grigóry tried to determine, from the walk, who was passing.

All of a sudden, it seemed to him, as though Matréná's shoulders were as cold, and covered with the same sort of sticky sweat as Tchízhik, when the latter was writhing with convulsions on the hospital cot. He shuddered, and said, in a dull voice:

"Sénka is dead . . . ."

"Dead? The kingdom of heaven to the child Sénka, newly-appeared before God!"\* said Matréná prayerfully, and then she began to spit fiercely—some of the soap had got into her mouth.

"I'm sorry for him," sighed Grigóry.

"He was a dreadful tease."

"He's dead, and that ends it! It's no business of yours now, what sort of a fellow he was! . . . But it's a pity he died. He was bold and lively. . . . The accordion . . . Hm! . . . He was a clever lad. . . . I sometimes used to look at him and think: I'll take him as an apprentice, or something of that sort. . . . He was an orphan . . . he would have got used to us, and

\* The Holy Orthodox Catholic Church of the East, of which Russia is now the most prominent representative, has four different burial-services: one for ecclesiastics, one for laymen, which undergoes certain changes if the burial takes place at Easter-tide (making the third), and one for children, or "infants," meaning children under eight years of age. All are very beautiful and touching. The above exclamation is the general one.—*Translator.*

## Orlóff and His Wife

have taken the place of a son to us. . . . For, you see, we have no children. . . . No. . . . You're so healthy, yet you don't bear any children. . . . You had one, and that was the end of it. Ekh, you woman! If we had some squalling little brats, you'd see we shouldn't find life so tiresome. . . . But now it's only live on, and work. . . . And for what? To feed myself and you. . . . And of what use are we . . . of what use is food to us? In order that we may work. . . . So it turns out to be a senseless circle. . . . But if we had children—that would be quite another matter. . . . That it would."

He said this in a sad, dissatisfied tone, with his head drooping low. Matréná stood before him and listened, gradually turning pale, as he continued:

"I'm healthy, you're healthy, and still we have no children. . . . What's the meaning of it? Why? Ye-es . . . a man thinks and thinks about it . . . and then he takes to drink!"

"You lie!" said Matréná firmly and loudly.—"You lie! Don't you dare to utter your dastardly words to me . . . do you hear? Don't you dare! You drink—because you choose to, out of self-indulgence, because you have no self-control, and my childlessness has nothing whatever to do with the matter; you lie, Gríshka!"

Grigóry was stunned. He flung himself back, against the back of his chair, cast a glance at his wife, and did not recognize her. Never before had he beheld her so infuriated, never had she looked at him with such mercilessly-angry eyes, or spoken with such power in her words.

"Come now, come!"—ejaculated Grigóry defiantly, clutching the seat of his chair with his hands.—"Come now, talk some more!"

## Orlóff and His Wife

"And so I will! I wouldn't have spoken, only that reproach from you I cannot endure! I don't bear you children, don't I? And I won't! I can't any more. . . . I can't have any children! . . ." a sob was audible in her shriek.

"Don't yell," her husband warned her.

"Why don't I bear children, hey? Come now, recall to your mind, Grísha, how much have you beaten me? How many kicks in the side have you showered on me? . . . reckon them up, do! How you have tortured, racked me? Do you know how much blood flowed from me after your tortures? My chemise used to be bloody clear up to my neck! And that's why I bear no children, my dear husband! How can you reproach me for that, hey? How is it that your ugly phiz isn't ashamed to look me in the face? . . . For you are a murderer! you have killed your children, killed them yourself! and now you reproach me because I don't bear any. . . . I have endured everything from you, I have forgiven you for everything,—but those words I will never forgive, to all eternity! When I am dying,—I'll call that to mind! Don't you understand that you are to blame yourself, that you have destroyed me? Ain't I like all women—don't I want children? Do you think I don't want them? Many a night, when I couldn't sleep, I have prayed to the Lord God that He would preserve the children in my body from you, you murderer! . . . When I see a strange child—I choke with bitterness, out of envy and pity for myself. . . . I'd like . . . Queen of Heaven! . . . I used to pet that Sénka on the sly. . . . What am I? O Lord! A barren woman . . ."

She began to sob. The words leaped from her mouth without sense of coherence.



## Orlóff and His Wife

Her face was spotted all over, she trembled, and scratched her neck, because the sobs gurgled in her throat. Keeping a stout grasp on his chair, Grigóry, pale and crushed, sat opposite her, and with widely-opened eyes stared at this woman, who was a stranger to him, and he was afraid of her . . . afraid that she would clutch him by the throat and strangle him. Precisely that was what her terrible eyes, blazing with wrath, promised him. She was twice as strong as he now, and he felt it, and turned cowardly; he could not rise and strike her, as he would have done, had he not understood that she had undergone a transformation, as though she had imbibed vast strength from some source.

“You have stung my very soul, Gríshka! Great is your sin toward me! I have endured, I have held my peace . . . because . . . I love you . . . but your reproaches I cannot bear! . . . My strength is exhausted. . . . You heaven-sent husband of mine! For those words of yours, may you be thrice accur . . .”

“Hold your tongue!—” thundered Gríshka, with a snarl. “You’re outrageous! Have you forgotten where we are? You accursed devil!”

There was a mist over Grigóry’s eyes. He could not discern who it was that was standing in the door-way, and talking in a bass voice; he swore in vile language, thrust the man aside, and rushed out into the fields. And Matréná, after standing still in the middle of the room for a minute, reeling and as though struck with blindness, with her hands outstretched before her, went to the cot, and fell upon it, with a groan.

Darkness descended, and the golden moon, covering the fields with shadows, peered curiously into the windows of the room from the sky, from amid ragged, dark-blue clouds.

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Soon a fine, drizzling rain began to beat upon the window-panes and the walls of the barracks—the forerunner of the interminable autumn rains which fill the soul with melancholy.

The pendulum of the clock ticked off the seconds with equable beat, the raindrops lashed the panes. Hour after hour passed, and the rain still descended, and on the cot, the woman lay motionless and stared, with swollen eyes, at the ceiling. Her face was gloomy, stern, her teeth were tightly clenched, her cheek-bones stood out prominently, and in her eyes gleamed both terror and sadness. And the rain still rattled against the walls and the window-panes; it seemed as though it were whispering something wearisomely-monotonous, were trying to convince someone of something, but had not sufficient passion to do it quickly, handsomely, with force, and hoped to attain its end by a torturing, interminable, colorless sermon, which lacked the sincere pathos of faith.

The rain continued and was still pouring when the sky became overcast with hues of approaching dawn, which presage an inclement day, and so resemble the color of a knife, which has been long in use, and has lost the gleam of its polish. But still Matréna could not sleep. In the monotonous murmur of the rain, she heard a question which was both anxious and alarming to her:

“What will happen now? What will happen now?”

It resounded importunately outside the windows, and an aching pain in all her being responded to it.

“What will happen now?”

The woman was afraid to answer herself, although the answer kept flashing up before her in the shape of a drunken husband, as fierce as any wild beast. But it was difficult to part with her dream of a calm, loving life; she

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had already got accustomed to this dream, and she banished from her a menacing foreboding. And at the same time, the consciousness flashed across her, that if this did happen—if Grigóry should take to drink again, she could no longer live with him. She saw him different, she herself had become a different person, and her former life aroused in her both fear and disgust—novel sensations, hitherto unknown to her. But she was a woman, and in the end, she began to upbraid herself for this breach with her husband.

“And how did it come about? . . . O Lord! . . . It’s just as though I had torn myself off a hook . . .”

In such contradictory, torturing reflections, another long hour passed by. Day dawned. A heavy fog was swirling over the plain, and the sky could not be seen through its gray mist.

“Mrs. Orlóff! Time to go on duty. . . .”

Mechanically obeying this summons, shouted through the door of her room, she slowly rose from her bed, washed herself in haste, and went to the barracks, feeling weak and half ill. In the barracks she evoked general surprise by the languor of her movements, and her gloomy face with its dull eyes.

“Mrs. Orlóff! You seem to be ill?” one of the doctors said to her.

“It’s nothing. . . .”

“But tell me, don’t stand on ceremony! you know, we can get a substitute for you. . . .”

Matréna felt conscience-stricken, she did not wish to betray her pain and terror to this person who was kind, but still a stranger to her, nevertheless. And summoning up, from the depths of her tortured soul, the remnants of her courage, she said to the woman-doctor, with a smile:

“It’s nothing! I have had a little quarrel with my hus-

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band. . . . It will pass off . . . it isn't the first time . . . .”

“You poor thing!”—sighed the doctor, who knew about her life.

Matréna wanted to fall down before her, bury her head in the doctor's lap, and scream. . . . But she restrained herself, and only pressed her lips tightly together, and passed her hand over her throat, as though she were thrusting back into her breast the sobs which were on the point of bursting forth.

When she was relieved from duty, she entered her room, and the first thing she did, was to look out of the window. Across the fields, to the barracks, a waggon was moving,—they must be bringing a sick person in it. Fine rain was sifting down from the gray storm-clouds. Nothing else was to be seen. Matréna turned away from the window, and with a heavy sigh, seated herself at the table, engrossed by the thought:

“What will happen now?”—And her heart beat time to these words.

For a long time she sat there, alone, in a heavy semi-doze, and every time the sound of footsteps in the corridor made her shudder, and rising from her chair, she looked out of the door. . . .

But when, at last, the door opened, and Grigóry entered, she did not shudder, and did not rise, for she felt as though the autumnal storm-clouds had suddenly descended upon her, from the sky, with all their weight.

Grigóry halted at the door, flung his wet cap on the floor, and stamping heavily with his feet, he approached his wife. He was streaming with water. His face was red, his eyes were dim, and his lips were stretched in a broad, stupid smile. As he walked, Matréna heard the water seeping in

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his boots. He was pitiful, and she had not imagined him in this aspect.

"Good!"—she said softly.

Grigóry waggled his head stupidly, and asked her:

"Would you like to have me bow down to your feet?"

She made no reply.

"You wouldn't? Well, that's your affair. . . . But I've been thinking all the while: am I guilty toward you or not? It turns out—that I am. So now I say: do you want me to bow down to your f-feet?"

She maintained silence, inhaling the odor of vódka which emanated from him, and a bitter feeling gnawed at her soul.

"Now, see here, you—don't you make faces! Take your chance while I'm peaceable . . ." said Grigóry, raising his voice.—"Come, are you going to forgive me?"

"You're drunk," said Matréna, with a sigh. . . .  
"Go and sleep. . . ."

"You lie, I'm not drunk, I'm tired, I've been walking and walking and thinking. . . . I've done a heap of thinking, brother . . . oh! You look out!"

He menaced her with his finger, laughing with a wry grimace.

"Why don't you speak?"

"I can't talk with you."

"You can't? Why not?"

All at once, he flared up, and his voice grew firmer.

"You screamed at me, you snarled at me yesterday . . . well, and now I'm asking your forgiveness. Understand that!"

He said this in a very ominous way, his lips quivered, and his nostrils were inflated. Matréna knew what that meant, and the past rose up before her in vivid colors: the

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cellar, the Saturday fights, the anguish and suffocation of their life.

"I understand!"—she said, sharply.—"I see that you are . . . turning into a beast again now . . . ekh, you disgusting creature!"

"I'm turning into a beast? That . . . hasn't anything to do with the case. . . . I say . . . will you forgive me? What are you thinking about? Do I need it—your forgiveness? I can get on capitally without it . . . but still, here, I want you to forgive me . . . Understand?"

"Go away from me, Grigóry!" . . . exclaimed the woman sadly, turning away from him.

"Go away?"—laughed Grigóry maliciously.—"I'm to go away, so that you will remain at liberty? Come now, I wo-on't! Have you seen this?"

He seized her by the shoulder, dragged her toward him, and flourished a knife in her face—a short, thick, sharp piece of rusty iron.

"We-ell?"

"Ekh, if you would only cut my throat,"—said Matréná, with a deep sigh, and freeing herself from his grasp, she turned away from him again. Then he, also, staggered back from her, startled, not by her words, but by the tone of them. He had heard those words from her lips before, had heard them more than once—but she had never uttered them in that manner. And the fact that she had turned away from him without fearing the knife, also augmented his amazement and discomfiture. Several seconds earlier it would have been easy for him to strike her, but now he could not do it, and did not wish to do it. Almost frightened by her indifference to his threat, he flung the knife on the table, and with dull wrath he asked his wife:

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“Devil! What is it you want?”

“I don’t want anything!”—cried Matréná, sighing.—  
“And what do you want? Did you come to kill me? Well, then, kill me!”

Grigóry looked at her, and held his peace, not knowing what he could do now, and seeing nothing clearly in his tangled thoughts. He had come with a definite intention to conquer his wife. On the preceding day, during their clash, she had been stronger than he; he was conscious of that, and it lowered him in his own eyes. It was imperatively necessary that she should submit to him, he did not understand why, but he did know solidly, that it was necessary. Passionate by nature, he had gone through a great deal and had thought a great deal about the matter during those four and twenty hours, and—being an ignorant man—he did not know how to single out of the chaos those feelings which had been aroused by the just accusation boldly hurled at him by his wife. He understood that this was a revolt against him, and he had brought the knife with him, in order to frighten Matréná; he would have killed her, but she offered a less passive resistance to his desire to subjugate her. But here she was in front of him, helpless, overwhelmed with grief and yet stronger than he. It angered him to perceive this, and this anger had a sobering effect upon him.

“Listen!”—he said,—“and don’t you put on any conceited airs! You know that I, in downright earnest . . . will drive this into your ribs—and that’s the end of you! That will put an end to the whole matter! . . . It’s very simple . . .”

Conscious that he was not saying the proper thing, Grigóry paused. Matréná did not move, as she stood turned away from him. A feverishly-rapid reckoning up

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of all that she had gone through with her husband was in progress within her, and this imperative question throbbed in her heart:

“What will happen now?”

“Mótrya!”—Grigóry began suddenly and softly, propping himself with one hand on the table, and bending toward his wife.—“Am I to blame, if . . . everything isn’t . . . if it isn’t as it should be? . . . This is very disgusting to me!”

He twisted his head about and sighed.

“I’m so sick of it! I’m so cramped here on earth! Is this life? Come, let’s take the cholera patients,—what are they? Are they a support to me? Some will die, and others will get well, . . . and I must go on living again. How am I to live? it’s not life—only convulsions . . . isn’t that enough to make a man angry? I understand everything, you see, only it’s difficult for me to say that I can’t live so . . . but how I want to live . . . I don’t know! They heal those sick people yonder, and give them every attention—. . . but I’m healthy, and if my soul aches, am I any the less valuable than they? Just think of it—I’m worse off than a cholera patient. . . . I have convulsions in my heart—that’s what the trouble is! . . . And you shriek at me! . . . Do you think I’m a wild beast? A drunkard, and—that’s the end of it? Ekh you . . . you woman! you wooden . . .”

He spoke quietly and persuasively, but she did not hear his speech well, busy as she was in reviewing the past.

“Now you won’t speak . . .” said Gríshka, lending an ear to something new and powerful which was springing up within him.—“And why do you remain silent? What do you want?”



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“I want nothing from you!”—exclaimed Matréná . . .  
—“Why do you hammer away at me? Why do you torture me? What do you want?”

“What? Why . . . that, of course . . .”

But Orlóff became conscious that he could not tell his wife exactly what he wanted,—that everything should immediately become clear, so to speak, both to him and to her. He comprehended that something had formed between them which could not be removed by any words whatever . . .

Then a wild anger flashed up suddenly and vividly within him. Flourishing his arm, he dealt his wife a blow with his fist on the nape of her neck, and roared, like a wild beast:

“What are you about, you witch, hey? Why are you playing? I’ll kill you, you carrion!”

The blow drove her, face down, upon the table, but she instantly sprang to her feet, and, looking straight in her husband’s face, with a gaze of hatred, she said firmly, loudly and curtly:

“Beat away!”

“Shut up!”

“Beat! Well?”

“Akh, you devil!”

“No, Grigóry, there’s been enough of that. I won’t have any more of it. . . .”

“Shut up!”

“I won’t allow you to jeer at me. . . .”

He gnashed his teeth, and retreated from her a pace—perhaps with the object of hitting her more conveniently.

But, at that moment, the door opened, and Doctor Vášhtchenko made his appearance on the threshold.

“Wha-at’s the meaning of this? Where are you, hey?”

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What sort of a performance are you going through with?"

His face was stern and astounded. Orlóff was not in the slightest degree abashed at the sight of him, and he even bowed to him, saying:

"It's— . . . disinfection between husband and wife."

And he laughed convulsively in the doctor's face.

"Why didn't you present yourself for duty?"—shouted the doctor sharply, incensed by the laugh.

Gríshka shrugged his shoulders, and calmly declared:

"I was busy . . . about my own affairs. . . ."

"So . . . yes! And who was making that row here last night?"

"We . . . ."

"You? Very good. . . . You behave yourselves in domestic fashion . . . you prowl about without leave. . . ."

"We're not serfs, so . . . ."

"Silence! You've turned this into a dram-shop . . . you beasts! I'll show you where you are!"

A flood of wild daring, of passionate longing to overturn everything, to tear the confusion out of his hunted soul, overwhelmed Gríshka, in a burning tide. It seemed to him that he would now do something unusual, and, at the same time, deliver his dark soul from the entanglements which now held it in bondage. He shuddered, felt an agreeable sensation of cold in his heart, and turning to the doctor with a sort of cat-like grimace, he said:

"Don't you bother your gullet, don't yell. . . . I know where I am—in the exterminating house!"

"Wha-at? What did you say?"—the astonished doctor bent toward him.

Gríshka understood that he had uttered a savage word,

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but he did not cool down, for all that, but waxed all the hotter.

"Never mind, it will pass off! Digest that! . . . Matréna! Get ready to go!"

"No, my dear fellow, stop! You must answer me . . ." uttered the doctor, with ominous composure.—"You scoundrel, I'll give it to you for this. . . ."

Grishka stared point-blank at him, and began to talk, with the sensation that he was leaping off somewhere, and with every leap he breathed more and more freely.

"Don't you shout, Andréi Stepánovitch . . . don't swear. . . . You think that, because there's cholera, you can order me about. 'Tis a vain dream. . . . That you cure people, nobody needs to be told.—And what I said about extermination was, of course, an idle word, and I was angry. . . . But don't you yell so much, all the same. . . ."

"No, you lie!"—said the doctor calmly. . . . "I'll give you a lesson . . . hey, there, come hither!"

People were already standing in the corridor. . . . Grishka screwed up his eyes, and set his teeth.

"No, I'm not lying, and I'm not afraid . . . but if you want to give me a lesson, I'll tell you for your convenience. . . ."

"We-ell? Say it. . . ."

"I'll go to the town, and I'll spread the news: 'My lads! Do you know how they cure the cholera?'"

"Wha-at?"—and the doctor opened his eyes widely.

"So when we had that disinfection there with 'limination . . . ."

"What are you saying, devil take you!"—cried the doctor in a dull tone.—Irritation had given way in him to amazement in the presence of that young fellow whom he

## Orlóff and His Wife

had known as an industrious, far from unintelligent workman, and who now, no one knew why, was foolishly and stupidly running his neck into the noose. . . .

“What nonsense are you chattering, you fool?”

“Fool!”—rang like an echo through Gríshka’s whole being. He understood that this verdict was just, and he became all the more angry.

“What am I saying? I know . . . I don’t care . . .” he said, with wildly flashing eyes. . . .—Now I understand why the like of me never cares . . . and it’s utterly useless for us to restrain ourselves in our feelings. . . . Matréná, get ready!”

“I won’t go!” announced Matréná firmly.

The doctor stared at them with round eyes, and rubbed his brow, comprehending nothing.

“You’re . . . either a drunken man or a crazy man! Do you understand what you are doing?”

Gríshka would not, could not yield. In reply to the doctor, he said, ironically:

“And how do *you* understand it? What are *you* doing? Disinfection, ha, ha! You heal the sick . . . while the well people die with the narrowness of their life. . . . Matréná! I’ll smash your pate! Go. . . .”

“I won’t go with you!”

She was pale, and unnaturally motionless, but her eyes gazed firmly and coldly into her husband’s face. . . . Gríshka, despite all his heroic courage, turned away from her, and hanging his head, made no reply.

“Faugh!” and the doctor spat.—“The devil himself couldn’t make out the meaning of this. . . . Here you! Begone! Take yourself off, and be thankful that I haven’t been severe with you . . . you ought to be arrested . . . you blockhead! Get out!”

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Grigóry glanced, in silence, at the doctor, and then dropped his head again. He would have felt better if they had thrashed him, or even sent him to the police-station. . . . But the doctor was a kind man, and perceived that Orlóff was almost irresponsible.

"For the last time, I ask you, will you go?" Gríshka hoarsely asked his wife.

"No, I will not go,"—she answered, and bent down a little, as though in expectation of a blow.

Gríshka waved his hand.

"Well . . . the devil take the whole lot of you!—And what the devil do I want you for, anyway?"

"You're a savage blockhead," began the doctor, argumentatively.

"Don't you bark!" shouted Gríshka.—"Well, you cursed trollop, I'm going! I think we shall never see each other again . . . but perhaps we shall . . . that will be as I choose! But if we do meet again—it won't be good for you, I warn you!"

And Orlóff moved toward the door.

"Good-bye . . . tragedian! . . ." said the doctor sardonically, when Gríshka came on a level with him.

Grigóry halted, and raising his mournful flashing eyes to him, he said in a repressed, low tone:

"Don't you touch me . . . don't wind the spring up tight . . . it has unwound, and hasn't hit anybody . . . so let it go at that."

He picked up his cap from the floor, stuck it on his head, bristled up, and went out, without even glancing at his wife.

The doctor gazed searchingly at her. She stood before him pale, with an insensible sort of face.—The doctor nodded his head in the direction of Grigóry, and asked her:

## Orlóff and His Wife

“What is the matter with him?”

“I don’t know . . .”

“Hm. . . And where will he go now?”

“On a drunken spree!”—replied Mrs. Orlóff firmly.

The doctor frowned and went away.

Matréna looked out of the window. The figure of a man was moving swiftly along, in the evening twilight, through wind and rain, from the barracks to the town. The figure was alone, in the midst of the wet, gray plain . . . The face of Matréna Orlóff turned still paler, she went into a corner, fell on her knees, and began to pray, zealously executing ground-reverences,\* sighing out her petitions in a passionate whisper, and rubbing her breast and her throat with hands which trembled with emotion.

One day I was inspecting the trade-school in N. . . . My guide was a well-known man, one of its founders. He conducted me over this model school, and explained things to me:

“As you see, we have reason to boast. . . . Our nurseling is growing and developing splendidly. The teaching corps are wonderfully well matched. In the boot and shoe shop, for example, we have a woman teacher, a plain female shoemaker, a peasant woman, that is to say, even a very ordinary peasant woman, such a dainty, roguish creature, but of irreproachable conduct.—However, devil take that side of the matter. . . . Ye-es! So then, as I was saying, that shoemaker is a simple little peasant woman, but how she does work! . . . how cleverly she teaches her trade, with what love she treats the little children—it’s amazing! she’s an invaluable worker. . . . She works for twelve rubles a month, and lodgings at the

\* That is—touching the forehead to the floor.—*Translator.*

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school . . . and she supports two orphans, to boot, on her scanty means! She's a very interesting figure, I must tell you."

He praised the woman shoemaker so zealously that he evoked in me a desire to make her acquaintance. This was soon arranged, and one day Matréná Ivánovna Orlóff narrated to me the sad story of her life. For a while, after she had separated from her husband, he gave her no rest:—he came to her in a drunken condition, kicked up rows, spied on her everywhere, and was merciless. She bore it patiently.

When the barracks were closed the woman doctor suggested to Matréná Ivánovna that she should get a place at the school, and defend her against her husband. Both undertakings were successful, and Mrs. Orlóff entered upon a tranquil, laborious life: under the guidance of her acquaintances, the women medical practitioners, she learned to read and write, took two orphans out of the asylum to rear,—a girl and a boy,—and was working away, content with herself, with grief and terror recalling her past. She was perfectly devoted to her pupils, understood the significance of her activity in a broad sense, discharged it in a thoroughly competent manner, and had won general interest and sympathy for herself among the managers of the school. But she was coughing with a dry, suspicious cough, an ominous flush burned on her sunken cheeks, and her gray eyes held much melancholy. Her married life with uneasy Gríshka was taking effect.

But he had dropped his wife, and it was now the third year since he had annoyed her. He sometimes made his appearance in N., but did not show himself to Matréná. He was "on the tramp," as she defined to me his manner of life.

I succeeded in making his acquaintance. I found him

## Orlóff and His Wife

in one of the dives of the town, and after two or three sittings, he and I became friends. After repeating to me the story which his wife had told me, he meditated for a little while, and then said:

“ So you see, *Maxím Savvátievitch*, it raised me up, and then dashed me down. So I never performed any heroic deed. Even to this day, I long to distinguish myself in some way. . . . I'd like to mash up the whole earth into dust, or assemble a gang of comrades and kill off all the Jews . . . down to the very last one! Or, in general, something which would set me up above all men, and so that I could spit on them from a height. . . . And say to them: ‘ *Akh, you reptiles! Why do you live? How do you live? You're a pack of hypocritical rascals, that's all you are!*’ And then, I'd kick up my heels from above or there below, and . . . they'd smash into bits! Ye-es, so I would! Devil take it . . . it's tiresome! And *akh*, how tiresome and narrow life is to me! . . . I thought, when I got rid of *Matréshka*:—‘ *Co-ome now, Grínya,\* sail away into freedom, the anchor's weighed!*’ On the contrary, it didn't come out that way—the channel was shallow! Stop! And I ran aground. . . . But I shan't dry up, never fear! I shall display myself! How?—the devil only knows that! . . . My wife? Well I consign her to all the devils! Does a man like me want a wife? . . . What should I do with her . . . when I feel drawn in all four quarters at once? . . . I was born with uneasiness in my heart . . . and it is my fate to be a tramp! The very best position in the world is free—and yet cramped! I've walked and ridden in all directions . . . and found no consolation. . . . Do I drink? Of course, and what of that?

\* Another variation of *Grigóry*.—*Translator*.



## Orlóff and His Wife

Vódka extinguishes the heart, all the same. . . . And my heart burns with a great fire. . . . Everything is repulsive—towns, villages, people of different calibres. . . . Faugh! Can't anything better be invented? They're all down on one another. . . . I'd like to choke the whole lot of them! Ekh, life, you're the devil's great wisdom!"

The heavy door of the dram-shop where Orlóff and I were sitting, kept opening incessantly, creaking in a voluptuous sort of way as it did so. And the interior of the dram-shop aroused one's imagination of some sort of wild beast's maw, which was slowly but inevitably devouring, one after the other, the poor Russian people, the uneasy and the rest.

**KONOVÁLOFF**



## KONOVÁLOFF

As I carelessly ran my eye over the newspaper, it fell upon the name of Konováloff, and as it arrested my attention, I read the following:

“Last night, Alexánder Ivánovitch Konováloff, petty burgher of the town of Muróm, aged forty, hanged himself to the ventilator of the stove in the general ward of the local prison. The suicide was arrested in Pskóff, for vagrancy, and was forwarded by stages, under police escort, to his native place. The prison authorities state that he was always a quiet, reticent, thoughtful man. The prison doctor decided that melancholia must be regarded as the cause which incited Konováloff to suicide.” I read this brief announcement in brevier type—it is the custom to print notes about the destruction of insignificant people in small type—I read it through, and reflected that I might be able to throw a somewhat clearer light upon the cause which had led that meditative man to go out of life, because I had known him, and, at one time, had lived with him. Indeed, I had not even the right to remain silent concerning him:—he was a splendid young fellow, and such as he are not often met with on life’s highway.

I was eighteen years old when I first met Konováloff. At that time, I was working in a bakery, as assistant baker. The baker was a soldier from “the musical division,” a terrible vódka-drinker, who frequently spoiled the

## Konováloff

dough, and when he was drunk, was fond of playing tunes on his lips, and strumming out various pieces with his fingers on anything that came handy. When the proprietor of the bakery reprimanded him for having spoiled his wares, or for being behindhand with them in the morning, he flew into a rage, and cursed the proprietor, cursed him mercilessly, always calling his attention, at the same time, to his musical talent.

“The dough has stood too long!”—he shouted, bristling up his long red mustache, and making a noise with his thick lips, which were always moist, for some reason or other.—“The crust is burned! The bread is raw! Akh, the devil take you, you cock-eyed spectre! Was I born into the world to do this work? Curse you and your work—I’m a musician! Do you understand? If the viola-player got drunk, I used to play the viola: if the hautboy man was under arrest, I blew the hautboy; if the cornet-à-piston has fallen ill, who can take his place? Sutchkóff, I! Glad to do my best, your Well-Born! \* Tim-tar-ram-ta-ddi! But you’re a p-peasant, *katzáp!* † Pay me my wages and discharge me!”

And the proprietor, a corpulent, bloated man, with small squinting eyes which were buried in fat, and a feminine face, stamped about the floor with his short, fat legs, his huge body swaying heavily the while, and roared, in a squealing voice:

“Ruiner! Destroyer! Christ-seller of a Judas! Oh Lord, why hast Thou chastised me with such a man!” Spreading his short fingers wide apart, he raised his hands

\* The regulation reply of the soldier to an officer’s greeting or request.—*Translator.*

† A nickname used by Little Russians for Great Russians—meaning, in general “a soldier”;—as the Great Russians call Little Russian *Khokhól*, or “top-knot.”—*Translator.*

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to heaven, and all of a sudden roared loudly, in an ear-splitting voice:—

“And what if I hand you over to the police for your mutiny?”

“Hand the servitor of the Tzar and the Fatherland over to the police?” bellowed the soldier, and started to administer a drubbing to the proprietor. The latter beat a retreat, spitting to one side in disgust, snorting wrathfully and cursing. This was all that he could do—it was summer, a season when it is extremely difficult to find a good baker in the Vólga river-town.

Such scenes were of almost every day occurrence. The soldier drank, spoiled the dough and played various marches and waltzes or “numbers,” as he expressed it; the proprietor gnashed his teeth, and the result of it all was, that I was obliged to work for two, which was not very logical, and was very fatiguing.

And I was highly delighted when, one day, the following scene took place between the proprietor and the soldier.

“Well, soldier,” said the proprietor, making his appearance in the bakery with a beaming and satisfied countenance, and his little eyes sparkled with a malicious smile,—“well, soldier, puff out your lips, and play the campaign march!”

“What’s that for?!” gloomily said the soldier, who was lying on the tub with the dough, and, as usual, was half drunk.

“Prepare to march, corporal!” said the proprietor exultantly.

“Whither?” inquired the soldier, lowering his legs off the tub, and feeling that something was wrong.

“Wherever you like—to a Turkish woman or an English woman, as you please.”

## Konováloff

"How am I to understand that?" shouted the soldier vehemently.

"You are to understand that I won't keep you another hour. Go upstairs, get your wages, and take yourself off—march!"

The soldier had become accustomed to feel his strength, and the helpless position of his master, and the latter's announcement somewhat sobered him: he could not help understanding how difficult it would be for him, with his knowledge of the trade, to find another place.

"Come now, you're lying! . . ." he said with alarm, rising to his feet.

"Get out with you,—get out . . ."

"Get out?"

"Clear out!"

"That means, I have worked myself out," and the soldier shook his head sadly. . . . "You have sucked the blood out of me, sucked me dry, and now you turn me out. That's clever! That's good! Akh, you . . . spider!"

"I'm a spider, am I?" boiled up the proprietor.

"Yes, you are! A blood-sucking spider—that's what you are!" said the soldier with conviction, and walked, reeling, toward the door.

The proprietor looked after him with a spiteful laugh, and his little eyes glittered joyfully.

"Go along with you, now, and get a place with somebody! Ye-es! I've given you such a character everywhere, my dear little dove, that you may beg as you will—no one will take you! They won't hire you anywhere. . . . I've settled your hash for you, you rotten-headed, stupid, infernal creature!"

"Have you already hired a new baker?" I inquired.

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“A new one? No, he isn't new—he's the old one. He was my friend. Ah, what a baker! Regular gold! But he's a drunkard also, eh, what a drunkard! Only, he has long fits of hard drinking. . . . Now he'll come, and set to work, and for three or four months he'll strain every sinew and toil away like a bear! He'll know no sleep, no rest, and won't stick at the wages, no matter what you give him. He'll work and sing! He sings so, my dear fellow, that it's even impossible to listen to him—your heart grows heavy with it. He sings, and sings—and then he takes to drink again!”

The proprietor sighed, and waved his hand with a hopeless gesture.

“And when he starts in to drink—there's no stopping him. He drinks until he falls ill, or has drunk himself stark naked. . . . Then he feels ashamed of himself, probably, for he vanishes somewhere, like an unclean spirit at the smell of incense. . . . And here he is. . . . Have you really come, Lesá?”

“Yes,” replied a deep, chest voice from the threshold.

There, with his shoulder propped against the jamb of the door, stood a tall, broad-shouldered peasant, about thirty years of age. In costume, he was a typical tramp; in face and figure, a genuine Slav—a rare specimen of the race. He wore a red cotton shirt, incredibly dirty and tattered, full trousers of coarse, home-made linen, and on one of his feet were the remains of a rubber boot, while on the other was an old leather boot-leg. His light, reddish-brown hair was tangled all over his head, and small chips, straws and bits of paper stuck in the snarls: all these things also adorned his luxuriant, light-reddish beard, which covered his chest like a fan. His long, pallid, weary face was lighted up by large, pensive blue eyes, which gazed at



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me with a caressing smile. And his lips which were handsome, although a trifle pale, also smiled beneath his reddish mustache. This smile seemed to say:

“This is the sort of fellow I am. . . . Don’t condemn me. . . .”

“Come in, Sashók, here’s your helper,” said the proprietor, rubbing his hands, and affectionately eyeing over the mighty form of the new baker. The latter stepped forward silently, and offered me his long hand, with the powerful wrist of a legendary hero; we exchanged greetings; he seated himself on the bench, stretched his legs out in front of him, stared at them, and said to the proprietor:

“Buy me two changes of shirts, Nikolá Nikítitch, and boot-slippers.\* And some linen for a cap.”

“You shall have them all, never fear! I have caps on hand; you shall have shirts and trousers by this evening. Come now, set to work in the meantime; I know you, I know what sort of a fellow you are. I don’t mean to insult you—no one can insult Konováloff . . . because he never insults anyone. Is the boss a wild beast? I have worked myself, and I know how a radish makes the tears flow. . . . Well, stay here, my lads, and I’ll take myself off . . . .”

We were left alone.

Konováloff sat on the bench and gazed about him with a smile, but without saying a word. The bakery was located in a cellar, with a vaulted ceiling, and its three windows were below the level of the earth. There was not much light, and there was very little air, but, on the other hand, there was a great deal of dampness, dirt and flour dust. Along the walls stood long bins: one had dough on it, on

\* Shoes—or slippers—made from boots by cutting off the legs.—*Translator.*

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another the dough had just been mixed with yeast, the third was empty. Upon each bin fell a dull streak of light from one of the windows. The huge oven took up nearly one third of the bakery; beside it, on the filthy floor, lay sacks of flour. In the oven long logs of wood were blazing hotly, and their flame, reflected on the gray wall of the bakery, surged and quivered, as though it were narrating some story without sounds. The odor of fermenting dough and of humidity filled the rank air.

The vaulted, soot-begrimed ceiling oppressed one with its weight, and the combination of daylight and of the fire in the oven formed a sort of vague illumination which was very trying to the eyes. Through the windows, a dull roar poured in, and dust blew in from the street. Konováloff surveyed everything, sighed, and turning half-way round to me, inquired in a bored tone:

“Have you been working here long?”

I told him. Then we fell silent again, and inspected each other with furtive, sidelong glances.

“What a jail!” he sighed. . . . “Shan’t we go out into the street, and sit at the gate?”

We went out to the gate, and sat down on the bench.

“We can breathe here, at least. I can’t get used to this pit all at once . . . no I can’t. Judge for yourself—I’ve just come from the sea. . . . I’ve been working at the fishing stations on the Caspian. And, all of a sudden, from that airy space—bang! into a hole!”

He looked at me with a melancholy smile, and ceased speaking, staring intently at the people who passed by in carriages and on foot. In his clear blue eyes shone much melancholy over something or other. . . . Twilight descended; it was stifling, noisy, dusty in the street, and the houses cast shadows across the road. Konováloff sat with

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his back resting against the wall, his arms folded across his chest, and his fingers straying through the silky strands of his beard. I gazed askance at his pallid, oval face, and thought: What sort of a man is this? But I could not make up my mind to enter into conversation with him, because he was my master, and also because he inspired me with a strange sort of respect for him.

His brow was furrowed with three slender wrinkles, but sometimes they were smoothed out, and disappeared, and I very much wished to know what the man was thinking about.

“Come along: it must be time to set the third batch of dough to rise. You mix the second, and, in the meantime, I’ll set it, and then we’ll knead out the loaves.”

When he and I had “weighed out” and placed in the pans one mountain of dough, mixed another, and set the leavened dough for a third—we sat down to drink tea, and then Konováloff, putting his hand into the breast of his shirt, asked me:

“Do you know how to read? Here then, read this,”—and he thrust into my hand a small smeared and crumpled sheet of paper.

“Dear Sáša,” \* I read. “I salute and kiss you from afar. Things are going badly with me, and life is tiresome, I can hardly wait for the day when I shall elope with you, or shall live in your company; this accursed life has bored me to the last degree, although, at first, I liked it. You will understand that well, and I, also, had begun to understand it, when I became acquainted with you. Please write to me as soon as you can; I want very much to receive a little note from you. And meanwhile, farewell until we

\* Lesá and Sashók, as well as Sáša and Sáška are diminutives of Alexander.—*Translator*.

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meet again, but not good-bye, you dear bearded friend of my soul. I will not write you any reproaches, although I'm angry with you, because you are a pig—you went away without taking leave of me. Nevertheless, you have never been anything but good to me: you were the first of that sort, and I shall never forget it. Can't you make an effort, Sáša, to have me excluded? The girls told you that I would run away from you, if I were excluded; but that is all nonsense, and a downright lie: If you would only take pity on me, I would be like a dog to you, after my exclusion. It would be so easy for you to do that, you know, but it's very difficult for me. When you were with me, I wept because I was forced to live like that, although I did not tell you so. Until we meet again. Your Kapitólina."

Konováloff took the letter from me, and began thoughtfully to turn it about between the fingers of one hand, while he twisted his beard with the other.

"And do you know how to write?"

"Yes."

"And have you ink?"

"Yes."

"Write a letter to her, for Christ's sake, won't you? She must consider me a rascal, she must be thinking that I have forgotten her. . . . Write!"

"Very well. This very minute, if you like. . . . Who is she?"

"A woman of the town. . . . You can see for yourself—she writes about her exclusion. That means, that I am to promise the police that I will marry her, and then they will give her back her passport, and will take her little book away from her, and from that time forth, she will be free! Do you catch on?"

Half an hour later a touching epistle to her was ready.

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"Come now, read it, and let's see how it has turned out?" begged Konováloff impatiently.

This is the way it had turned out:

"Kápa! You must not think that I am a scoundrel, and that I have forgotten you. No, I have not forgotten you, but I have simply been on a spree, and have drunk up all my money. Now I have hired out in a place again, and to-morrow I shall get the boss to advance me some money, and I will send it to Philip, and he will have you excluded. There will be money enough for your journey. And meanwhile—farewell until we meet. Your Alexánder."

"Hm . . ." said Konováloff, scratching his head,—  
"you ain't much of a writer. You haven't put any compassion into your letter, nor any tears. And then, again—I asked you to curse me with all sorts of words, and you haven't written a bit of that . . ."

"But why should I?"

"So that she may see that I feel ashamed in her presence, that I understand that I am to blame toward her. And what have you done! You've written it just exactly as though you were scattering peas! Now, you mix in some tears!"

I was compelled to mix some tears into the letter, which I managed to do successfully. Konováloff was satisfied, and laying his hand on my shoulder, he said cordially:

"There, that's stunning! Thanks! Evidently, you're a good lad . . . which means, that you and I are going to get along well together."

I had no doubt on that point, and asked him to tell me about Kapitólina.

"Kapitólina? She's a young girl—quite a child. She was the daughter of a merchant in Vyátka. . . . Well,

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and she went astray. The longer it lasted, the worse it got, and she went into one of those houses . . . you know? I came—and saw that she was still a mere child! Good Lord, I said to myself, is it possible? Well, so I made acquaintance with her. She began to cry. Says I: ‘Never mind, have patience! I’ll get you out of this—only wait!’ And I had everything ready, that is to say, the money and all . . . And, all of a sudden, I went on a spree, and found myself in Ástrakhan. A certain man told her where I was, and she wrote me that letter, to Ástrakhan . . .”

“Well, and what are you going to do about it,”—I asked him, “do you intend to marry her?”

“Marry her,—how can I? If I have one of my drinking bouts, what sort of a bridegroom would I be? No, this is what I mean to do. I’ll get her released—and then, she may go wherever she likes. She’ll find a place for herself . . . perhaps she’ll turn out a decent woman.”

“She says she wants to live with you . . .”

“Oh, she’s only fooling. They’re all like that—all the women. . . . I know them very well indeed. I’ve had a lot of different sorts. One, even, was a merchant’s wife, and rich! I was a groom in a circus, and she cast her eyes on me. ‘Come,’ says she,—‘and be my coachman.’ About that time I had got sick of the circus, so I consented, and went. Well, and so. . . . She began to make up to me. They had a house, horses, servants—they lived like the nobility. Her husband was a short, fat man, after the style of our boss, but she was as thin and flexible as a cat, and fiery. When she used to embrace me, and kiss me on the lips—hot coals seemed to be sprinkled on my heart. And I’d get all of a tremble, and even feel frightened. She used to kiss me, and cry all the time; even her shoulders

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heaved. I would ask her: 'What ails you, Vyérunka?' And she would say: 'You're a child, Sásha; you don't understand anything.' She was stunning. . . . And she spoke the truth when she said I didn't understand anything—I was pretty much of a fool, I know. What I do—I don't understand. How I live—I don't think!"

He ceased speaking, and gazed at me with widely-opened eyes; in them shone something which was not exactly fright, nor yet exactly a query,—something troubled and meditative, which rendered his handsome face still more melancholy and more beautiful. . . .

"Well, and how did you end matters with the merchant's wife?" I asked.

"Well, you see, sadness descends upon me. Such sadness, I must tell you, brother, that at those times I simply can't live. It's as though I were the only man on all the earth, and there were no living thing anywhere except myself. And at such times, everything is repugnant to me—every earthly thing; and I become a burden to myself, and all people are a burden to me; if all of them were to fall dead, I wouldn't give a sigh! It must be an ailment, with me. It made me take to drinking . . . before that, I did not drink. Well, so this sadness came upon me, and I said to her, to that merchant's wife: 'Véra Mikháilovna! Let me go, I can't stand it any longer!'—'What,' says she, 'are you tired of me?'—And she laughed, you know, in such an ugly way.—'No,' says I, 'I'm not tired of you, but I'm no match for myself.' At first she didn't understand me, and she even began to scream, and to rail. . . . Afterwards, she did understand. She dropped her head, and said: 'Well, then, go! . . .' and burst out crying. Her eyes were black, and she was all swarthy. Her hair was black, also, and curly. She was

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not of the merchant-class by birth, but the daughter of a state official. . . . Ye-es . . . I was sorry for her, but I was repulsive even to myself at that time. Why did I knuckle under to a woman?—anybody knows why. . . . Of course, she found life tiresome with such a husband. He was exactly like a sack of flour. . . . She cried for a long time—she had got used to me. . . . I used to pet her a lot: I used to take her in my arms, and rock her. She would fall asleep, and I would sit and gaze at her. People are very handsome in their sleep, they are so simple; they breathe and smile, and that's all. And then again—when we lived at the villa in the country, she and I used to go driving together—she loved that with all her heart. We would come to some little nook in the forest, tie the horses, and cool ourselves off on the grass. She would order me to lie down, then she would put my head on her knees, and read me some little book or other. I would listen, and listen, until I fell asleep. She read nice stories, very nice stories. One of them I shall never forget—about dumb Gerásim,\* and his beloved dog. He, that dumb fellow, was a persecuted man, and no one loved him, except his dog. People laughed at him, and all that sort of thing, and he went straight to his dog. . . . It was a very pitiful story . . . yes! But the affair took place in the days of serfdom. . . . And his lady-mistress says to him: 'Dumb man, go drown your dog, for he howls.'—Well, so the dumb man went. . . . He took a boat, and put the dog aboard it, and set out. . . . At this point, I used to feel the cold shivers run over me. Oh Lord! The sole joy on earth of a dumb man was being killed! What sort of behavior is that? Akh—they were wonderful tales! And

\* Iván S. Turgéneff's famous tale: "Mumú."—*Translator.*



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really—there was this good thing about it! There are people for whom all the world consists of one thing—a dog, for example. And why a dog? Because there is no one else to love such a man, but the dog loves him. It is impossible for a man to live without some sort of love;—that's why he is given a soul, that he may love. . . . She read me a great many stories. She was a splendid woman, and I'm sorry for her this minute. . . . If it hadn't been for my planet,—I wouldn't have left her until she wished it herself, or until her husband had found out about my performances with her. She was so caressing—first of all; that is to say, not exactly caressing, in the way of giving presents, but, so . . . caressing after the fashion of the heart. She would kiss me and she was just the same as any other woman . . . and then, such a sort of fit would come over her . . . so that it was downright astonishing what a good person she was. She would look straight into your soul, and talk to you like a nurse or a mother. At such times, I was just like a five-year-old boy with her. But nevertheless, I went away from her—because of that sadness! I pined for some other place. . . . 'Good-bye,' says I, 'Véra Mikháilovna, forgive me.'—'Good-bye, Sásha,' says she. And the queer woman—she bared my arm to the elbow, and set her teeth into it, as though it had been meat! I came near yelling! So she almost bit out a whole piece . . . my arm ached for three weeks afterwards. And here, you see, the mark is there yet . . . .”

Baring his arm, as muscular as that of a hero of epic song, white and red, he showed it to me, with an amiably melancholy smile. On the skin of the arm, near the elbow bend, a scar was plainly visible—two semicircles, which almost met at the tips. Konováloff looked at them, and shook his head, with a smile.

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"The queer woman!" he repeated; "she bit me by way of a keepsake."

I had heard stories in this spirit before. Every member of the "barefoot brigade" has, in his past, a "merchant's wife," or "a young lady of the nobility," and in the case of nearly all tramps, this merchant's wife and this well-born young lady turn out to be thoroughly fantastic figures, through countless repetitions, almost always combining the most contradictory physical and psychical features. If to-day she is blue-eyed, malicious and merry, you may expect to hear of her a week later as black-eyed, amiable and tearful. And the tramp generally talks about her in a sceptical tone, with a mass of details which are degrading to her.

But the story narrated by Konoválhoff did not arouse in me the distrust created by tales I had heard in the past. It rang true, it contained details with which I was unfamiliar—those readings from books, that epithet of 'boy,' as applied to the mighty form of Konoválhoff.

I pictured to myself the willowy woman, sleeping in his arms, with her head clinging close to his broad breast—it was a fine picture, and still further convinced me as to the truth of his story. And, in conclusion, his sad soft tone as he recalled the "merchant's wife"—was a unique tone. The genuine tramp never speaks in that tone either about women or about anything else—he likes to show that there is nothing on earth which he dares not revile.

"Why don't you say something? Do you think I am lying?"—inquired Konoválhoff, and, for some reason, alarm rang out in his voice. He stretched himself out on the sacks of flour, holding a glass of tea in one hand, and with the other stroking his beard. His blue eyes gazed at me searchingly and inquiringly, and the wrinkles lay sharply across his brow. . . . "No, you'd better believe me.

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. . . What object have I in lying? Even supposing that the like of us tramps are great hands at telling yarns. . . . It can't be done my friend:—if a man has never had anything good in life, surely he harms no one by making up with himself some tale or other, and telling it as a fact. He keeps on telling it, and comes to believe it himself, as though it had actually happened—he believes it, and—well, it is agreeable to him. Many folks live by that. You can't prevent it. . . . But I have told you the truth, as it happened, so I have told it to you. . . . Is there anything peculiar about that? A woman lives along, and gets bored, and the women are all good-for-nothing creatures. . . . Supposing I am a coachman, that makes no difference to a woman, because coachmen and gentlemen and officers are all men. . . . And all are pigs in her sight, all seek one and the same thing, and each one tries to take as much as he can, and to pay as little as possible. And the simple man is even better, more conscientious than the rest. And I'm very simple . . . the women all understand that very well about me, . . . they see that I will not offend them—that is to say, I won't . . . do . . . I won't jeer at them. When a woman sins, there's nothing she fears so much as a sneer, ridicule. They are more shame-faced than we are. We take our own, and, as like as not, go to the bazaar and tell about it, and begin to brag—'see here, look how we have cheated one fool!' . . . But a woman has nowhere to go, no one will reckon her sin as a dashing deed. My good fellow, even the most abandoned of them have more shame than we have."

I listened to him and thought: Was it possible that this man was true to himself in making all these speeches which did not fit in with him at all?

## Konováloff

But he, thoughtfully riveting upon me his eyes, clear as those of a child, went on talking, and astounded me more and more by his remarks.

It seemed to me that I was enveloped by something in the nature of a fog, a warm fog, which cleansed my heart, already, even at that time, greatly soiled with the mire of life.

The wood in the oven had burned down, and the bright pile of coals cast a rosy glow on the wall of the bakery . . . it quivered. . .

Through the window peeped a tiny speck of the blue sky with two stars in it. One of them—the large one—gleamed like an emerald, the other, not far from it, was barely visible.

A week passed, and Konováloff and I had become friends.

“You, also, are a simple lad! That’s good!”—he said to me, with a broad smile, as he slapped me on the shoulder with his huge hand.

He worked artistically. It was a sight worth seeing—how he exercised over a lump of dough weighing two hundred and fifty pounds, rolling it about in the mould, or how, bent over the bin, he kneaded, his mighty arms plunged to the elbows in the springy mass, which squeaked under his fingers of steel.

At first, when I saw how swiftly he hurled into the oven the raw loaves, which I could hardly toss fast enough from the moulds to his shovel,—I was afraid that he would pile them one on top of the other; but when he had baked three ovenfuls, and not one of the one hundred and twenty loaves—superb, rosy, tall—showed any sign of a “crush,” I understood that I had to deal with an artist in his own line. He loved to work, became absorbed in his business, grew depressed when the oven baked badly, or when the dough

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rose slowly, waxed angry and reviled the proprietor if the latter bought damp flour, and was as merry and contented as a child if the loaves came out of the oven properly rounded, tall, well-risen, with a moderately rosy hue, and thin, crisp crust. He was accustomed to take the most successful loaf from the shovel into his hand, and tossing it from palm to palm, scorching himself in the operation, laugh gaily, as he said to me:

“Eh, what a beauty you and I have made . . .”

And I found it pleasant to watch this gigantic child, who put his whole soul into his work, as every man, in every sort of work should do.

One day I asked him:

“Sásha, I am told that you sing well?”

He frowned and dropped his head.

“I do sing. . . . Only, I do it by fits and starts . . . in streaks. . . . When I begin to get sad, I shall begin to sing . . . And if I begin to sing . . . I shall begin to grieve. You’d better hold your tongue about that, don’t tease me. Don’t you sing yourself? Akh, you . . . what a piece you are! You’d . . . better wait for me . . . and whistle, in the meanwhile. Then we will both sing together. Is it a bargain?”

Of course, I assented, and whistled, when I wanted to sing. But sometimes I broke off, and began to hum beneath my breath, as I kneaded the dough, and rolled out the loaves. Konováloff listened to me, moved his lips, and after a while, reminded me of my promise. And sometimes he shouted roughly at me:

“Drop that! Don’t groan!”

One day I took a small book out of my trunk, and, propping myself in the window, I began to read.

Konováloff was dozing, stretched out on the bin with

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the dough, but the rustle of the leaves, as I turned them over above his ear made him open his eyes.

“What’s that little book about?”

It was “The Villagers of Podlípovo.” \*

“Read it aloud, won’t you?” he entreated.

So I began to read, as I sat on the window-sill, and he sat up on the bin, and leaning his head against my knees, he listened.—From time to time I glanced across the book at his face, and met his eyes—they cling to my memory yet—widely opened, intent, full of profound attention . . . And his mouth, also, was half open, revealing two rows of white, even teeth. His uplifted brows, the curving wrinkles on his lofty forehead, his arms, with which he clasped his knees, his whole motionless, attentive attitude warmed me up, and I endeavored, as intelligibly and as picturesquely as possible, to narrate to him the sad story of Sysóika and Pilá.

At last I got tired, and closed the book.

“Is that all?” Konováloff asked me, in a whisper.

“Less than half.”

“Will you read it all aloud?”

“If you like.”

“Ekh!”—He clasped his head in his hands, and began to rock back and forth, as he sat on the board. He wanted to say something, he opened and shut his mouth, sighing like a pair of bellows, and, for some reason or other, puckering up his eyes. I had not expected this result, and did not understand its meaning.

“How you read that!”—he began in a whisper.—“In different voices . . . How alive they all are. Apróska! She fairly squeals! Pilá . . . what fools! It made

\* “Podlípovtzui”—a well-known heart-rending story, by Ryeshét-nikoff.—*Translator.*

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me feel ridiculous to hear that . . . but I restrained myself. What comes next? Where are they going? Lord God! How true to nature it is! Why, they are just like real people . . . the most genuine sort of peasants. . . . And exactly as though they were alive, and their voices, and their faces. . . . Listen, Maxím! Let's put the bread in the oven, and then you go on reading!"

We put the bread in the oven, prepared another batch of loaves, and for another hour and forty minutes I continued to read the book. Then there was another pause—the bread was done, we took out the loaves, put in others, mixed some more dough, set some more to rise . . . and all this was done with feverish haste, and almost in silence.

Konováloff, with brows knitted in a frown, flung rare and monosyllabic orders at me, and hurried, hurried . . .

Toward morning, we had finished the book, and I felt as though my tongue had turned to wood.

Seated astride of a sack of flour, Konováloff stared me straight in the face with strange eyes, and maintained silence, with his arms propped on his knees.

"Is it good?" I asked.

He shook his head, puckered up his eyes, and again—for some reason in a whisper—began:

"Who wrote that?"—In his eyes gleamed amazement not to be expressed in words, and his face suddenly flushed with ardent feeling.

I told him who had written the book.

"Well—he's a man, that he is! How he grasped them! Didn't he? It's downright terrible. It grips your heart, that is, it nips your soul—it's so full of life. Well, now, what about him, that writer, what happened to him for that?"

"What do you mean?"

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"Well, for example, did they give him a reward or anything there?"

"But what did they need to reward him for?" I inquired, with crafty intent.

"For what? The book . . . in the nature of a police document. As soon as they read it . . . they consider: Pilá, Sysóika . . . what sort of folks were they? Everybody feels sorry for them. . . . They're unenlightened, innocent folks . . . What a life they had! Well, and . . ."

Konováloff looked at me in confusion, and timidly asserted:

"Some sort of orders ought to be given about that. Surely, they are human beings, and they ought to be supported."

In reply to this, I delivered a whole lecture to him. . . . But, alas! it did not produce the effect on which I had reckoned.

Konováloff fell into meditation, drooped his head, rocked his whole body about, and began to sigh, not interfering with a single word in my attempt to play the part of a professor. I got tired, at last, and paused.

Konováloff raised his head and gazed sorrowfully at me.

"And so they did not give him anything?" he inquired.

"Whom?" I asked, having entirely forgotten Ryeshétnikoff.

"The author?"

I was vexed. I made no reply, conscious that this vexation was begetting in me irritation toward my peculiar audience, which, evidently, did not regard himself as competent to settle world-problems, and was inclined to interest himself in the fate of a man rather than in the fates of humanity.



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Konováloff, without waiting for my answer, took the book in his hands, carefully turned it over, opened it, shut it, and putting it back in its place, heaved a deep sigh.

"How wonderful it all is, oh Lord!" he said, in an undertone . . . "A man has written a book . . . just paper and a few little dots, that's all. . . He wrote it . . . and . . . is he dead?"

"Yes," I answered curtly.

At that time, I could not endure philosophy, and still less metaphysics; but Konováloff, without inquiring as to my tastes, went on:

"He is dead, but the book remains, and people read it. A man looks at it with his eyes, and utters various words. And you listen, and understand: folks have lived in the world—Pilá, and Sysóika and Apróska. . . And you feel sorry for those folks, although you never have seen them, and they are nothing whatever to you! There may be thousands of live folks just like them walking along the street, and you see them, but you don't know anything about them . . . and you care nothing about them . . . they walk on, and on. . . But in the book there are none of them . . . still, you are so sorry for them that your very heart aches. . . How can a man understand that?—and so the author got no reward, and is dead? Nothing happened to him?"

I fairly exploded with rage. I told him all about the rewards of authors . . .

Konováloff listened to me, his eyes starting from their sockets with amazement, as he smacked his lips with compassion.

"A pretty state of things!" he sighed, from a full breast, and gnawing his left mustache, he hung his head with sorrow.

## Konováloff

Then I began to talk about the fatal influence of the dram-shop on the life of the Russian literary man, about the great and genuine talents which had gone to perdition through vódka—the only consolation of their hard-working lives.

“But is it possible that such men drink?” Konováloff asked me, in a whisper. Distrust of me, together with terror, and pity for these people flashed in his widely-opened eyes.—“They drink! How can they . . . after they have written books, take to drink?”

In my opinion, this was an irrelevant question, and I made no reply to it.

“Of course, they do it afterwards, . . .” Konováloff settled the point.—“Men live and watch life, and suck in the bitterness of others’ lives. They must have eyes of a special sort. And hearts, also. . . . They gaze at life, and grow sad. . . . And they pour out their grief in their books—. . . . But this does them no good because their hearts are touched—and you can’t burn grief out of that even with fire . . . all that is left for them to do, is to extinguish it with vódka. Well, and so they drink. . . . Have I got that right?”

I agreed with him, and this seemed to give him courage.

“Well, and in all justice,”—he continued, to develop the psychology of authors,—“they ought to be distinguished for that. Isn’t that so? Because they understand more than others, and point out divers disorders to others. Now take me, for instance, what am I? A barefooted, naked tramp, . . . a drunkard and a crack-brained fellow. There is no justification for my life. Why do I live on the earth, and to whom on earth is my life of any use, if you stop to consider it? I have no home of my own, no wife, no children—and I don’t even feel the want of any. I live

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and grieve. . . . What about? I don't know. It's somewhat as though my mother had brought me into the world without something which all other people possess . . . something which is more necessary than anything else to a man. I have no inward guide to my path . . . do you understand? How shall I express it? I haven't got the right sort of spark . . . or force, or whatever it is, in my soul. Well, some piece or other has been left out of me—and that's all there is to it! You understand? So I live along, and search for that missing piece, and grieve for it, but what it is—is more than I know myself . . . .”

“Why do you say this?” I asked.

He gazed at me, holding his hand to his head the while, and a powerful effort was written on his face—the labor of a thought which is seeking for itself a form.

“Why? Because—of the disorder of life. . . . That is to say . . . here am I living on, we'll say, and there's no place for me to go . . . nothing that I can hang on to . . . and such a life is confusion.”

“Well, and what comes next?” I pursued my inquiries as to the connection between him and authors, which was incomprehensible to me.

“What next? . . . That's what I can't tell you. . . . But this is what I think, that if some writer would cast an eye on me, then . . . he might be able to explain my life to me . . . couldn't he? What do you think about it?”

I thought I was capable myself of explaining his life to him, and immediately set about this task, which, in my opinion, was easy and clear. I began to discourse about conditions and surroundings, about inequality in general, about people who are the victims of life, and people who are life's priests.

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Konováloff listened attentively. He sat opposite me, with his cheek resting on his hand, and his large blue eyes widely opened, thoughtful and intelligent, gradually clouded over, as with a thin mist, while the folds lay more sharply across his forehead, and he seemed to be holding his breath, all absorbed as he was in his desire to comprehend my remarks.

All this was very flattering to me. With fervor I depicted to him his life, and demonstrated to him, that he was not to blame for being what he was; that is to say, that he, as a fact, was perfectly logical and quite regularly founded on a long series of premises from the distant past. He was the mournful victim of conditions, a being equal in rights with all men, by his very nature, and reduced by a long line of historical injustices to the degree of a social cipher. I wound up my explanation with the remark, which I had already made several times:

“You have nothing to blame yourself for. . . . You have been wronged . . . .”

He maintained silence, never taking his eyes from me; I beheld a brilliant, kindly smile dawn in them, and waited, with impatience, to see how he would reply to my speech.

The smile played over his lips, now he laughed affectionately, and reaching toward me with a soft, feminine movement, he laid his hand on my shoulder.

“How easily you talk about all that, brother! Only, whence comes your knowledge of all these matters? Is it all from books? But you have read a great lot of them, evidently—of books! Ekh, if I could only read as many! But the chief point is—that you speak very compassionately. This is the first time I have ever heard such a speech. It’s wonderful! Everybody accuses his neighbor of his bad luck, but you accuse life, the whole order of things. Ac-

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according to you it appears that a man is not to blame, himself, for anything whatever, but it is written in his fate that he is to be a tramp—well, and so he is a tramp, and it's very queer about prisoners, too: they steal because they have no work, but must eat. . . . How pitiful all that is, according to your showing! You have a weak heart, evidently!”

“Wait a bit!”—said I, “do you agree with me? Have I spoken truly?”

“You know best whether it is true or not—you can read and write. . . . It is true, I suppose, if you apply it to others. . . . But as for me . . . .”

“What then?”

“Well, I'm a special article. . . . Who's to blame if I drink? Pávelka, my brother, doesn't drink,—he has a bakery of his own in Perm. But here am I—I'm as good a workman as he is—but I'm a vagrant and a drunkard, and I have no longer any standing or position in life. . . . Yet we are the children of one mother. He is younger than I am. So it would appear that there is something wrong about me. . . . That means, that I was not born as a man should be born. You say yourself, that all men are equals: a man is born, he lives out his appointed time, then he dies! But I'm on a separate path. . . . And I'm not the only one—there are a lot of us like that. We must be peculiar people, and don't fit into any rule. We need a special account . . . and special laws . . . very strict laws,—to exterminate us out of life! For we are of no use, and we take up room in it, and stand in the way of other folks. . . . Who is to blame for us?—We are, ourselves—before ourselves and before life. . . . Because we have no desire to live, and we have no feeling toward ourselves. . . . Our mothers begot us in an unlucky hour—that's where the trouble lies . . . .”

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I was overwhelmed by this unexpected confutation of my deductions. . . . He—that big man with the clear eyes of a child—set himself apart from life in the ranks of the men who are useless in it, and therefore subject to extermination, with so light a spirit, with such laughing sadness, that I was positively stunned by his self-abasement, which I had never, up to that moment, beheld in any member of the bare-foot brigade, who, as a whole, are beings torn loose from everything, hostile to everything, and ready to try the force of their exasperated scepticism on everyone. . . . I had encountered only men who threw the blame on everything and complained of everything, persistently thrusting themselves aside from the series of obvious facts which obstinately confuted their personal infallibility, and who always cast the responsibility of their bad luck on taciturn Fate, on wicked people. . . . Konováloff did not blame Fate, and uttered not one word about people. He alone was to blame for all the disorder of his individual life, and the more persistently I endeavored to prove to him that he was “the victim of circumstances and conditions,” the more persistently did he argue with me as to his own guilt toward himself and toward life for his mournful lot. . . . This was original, and it enraged me. But he experienced satisfaction in scourging himself; it was with satisfaction and nothing else that his eyes beamed, when he shouted at me, in a ringing baritone voice:

“Every man is the master of himself, and no one is to blame if I am a scoundrel!”

In the mouth of an educated man, such remarks would not have surprised me, for there is no ulcer which cannot be found in the tangled and complicated psychical organism called “the intelligent man.” But from the lips of a tramp, although he was an intelligent man, amid the

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scorned of fate, the naked, hungry and vicious creatures half men, half beasts, who fill the filthy dens of the towns,—from the lips of a tramp it was strange to hear these remarks. I was forced to the conclusion that Konováloff really was—a special article,—but I did not wish to admit it.

From the inner point of view, Konováloff was a typical representative, down to the most petty detail, of the “golden horde”;\* but, alas! the longer I inspected him, the more convinced did I become that I had to deal with a variety which infringed upon my idea as to people who ought, long ago, to have been accounted a class, and who thoroughly merit attention, as hungering and thirsting in a powerful degree, as very malicious and far from stupid . . .

Our dispute waxed hotter and hotter.

“But just wait,” I shouted; “how can a man stand steady on his feet if divers obscure powers press upon him from all sides?”

“Lean the harder!” cried my opponent loudly, growing warm, and flashing his eyes.

“Yes, but what is one to lean against?”

“Find a point of support for yourself, and lean on it!”

“And why haven’t you done that?”

“Why, don’t I tell you, you queer man, that I myself am to blame for my own life! . . . I didn’t find my point of support! I’m seeking it, I’m pining for it—but I can’t find it!”

But we were obliged to look after the bread, so we set to work, each continuing to demonstrate to the other the truth of his views. As a matter of course, neither of us proved

\* An organized band of high-grade thieves.—*Translator.*

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anything, and when we had finished attending to the oven, we lay down to sleep.

Konováloff stretched himself out on the floor of the bakery, and soon fell asleep. I lay on the sacks of flour, and looked down from above upon his powerful, bearded figure, stretched out, in the fashion of an epic hero, on a mat which had been thrown down near the bin. There was an odor of hot bread, of fermented dough, of carbonic acid gas. . . . The day dawned, and the gray sky peeped through the panes of the windows, which were draped in shrouds of flour-dust. A peasant's cart rumbled past, and the shepherd blew his horn to assemble his flock.

Konováloff snored. I watched his broad breast rise and fall, and thought over various methods of converting him, as speedily as possible, to my belief, but could hit upon nothing suitable, and fell asleep.

In the morning, he and I rose, set the dough to rise, washed ourselves and sat down on the bin to drink tea.

"Say, have you got a little book?" inquired Konováloff.

"Yes."

"Will you read it to me?"

"All right."

"That's good! Do you know what? I'll live here a month, I'll get some money from the boss, and I'll give you half of it!"

"What for?"

"Buy some little books. . . . Buy some for yourself, after your own taste, and buy me some . . . about a couple. I want some about the peasants. After the fashion of Pilá and Sysóika. . . . And let them be written pathetically, you know, not to make fun of folks. . . . There are some which are downright trash! Pan-fílka and Filátka—even with a picture in the front—non-



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sense. Bureaucrats, various tales. I don't like all that sort of thing. I didn't know there were any like that one you have."

"Do you want one about Sténka Rázin?"

"About Sténka? . . . Is it good?"

"Very good."

"Fetch it along!"

And soon I was reading aloud to him N. Kostomároff's "The Revolt of Sténka Rázin." At first, this talented monograph, which is almost an epic poem, did not please my bearded hearer.

"Why aren't there any conversations in it?" he asked, peeping into the book. And when I explained the reason, he went so far as to yawn, and tried to hide the yawn, but did not succeed, and he said to me, in a confused and guilty way:

"Read away . . . never mind. I didn't mean to . . ."

I was pleased with his delicate tact, and pretended not to have observed anything, and that I did not, in the least, understand what he was talking about.

But in proportion as the historian depicted, with his artistic brush, the figure of Stepán Timoféevitch, and "the Prince of the Vólga Volunteers" started out from the pages of the book, Konováloff became transformed. In the beginning somewhat bored and indifferent, with eyes veiled in indolent dreaminess,—he gradually and by degrees imperceptible to me, presented himself to me in an astonishing, new form. As he sat on the bin opposite me, clasping his knees in his arms, and with his head laid upon them in such a way that his beard hid his legs, he stared at me with greedy, strangely burning eyes from beneath his sternly knit brows. There was not left in him a single trace of

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that childlike ingenuousness which had always so surprised me in him, and all that simplicity and feminine softness, which accorded so well with his kindly blue eyes, were now darkened and dried up, . . . had vanished somewhere. Something lion-like, fiery was contained in his muscular figure, thus curled up in a ball. I stopped reading and gazed at him.

“Read away,”—he said softly but impressively.

“What ails you?”

“Read!” he repeated, and there was an accent of irritation as well as of entreaty in his tone.

I continued, casting an occasional glance at him, and noting that he was becoming more and more inflamed. Something emanated from him which excited and intoxicated me—a sort of glowing mist. The book, also, exerted its influence. . . . And thus it was in a state of nervous tremor, full of foreboding of something unusual, that I reached the point where Sténka was captured.

“They captured him!” roared Konováloff.

Pain, affront, wrath, readiness to rescue Sténka resounded in his mighty exclamation.

The sweat started out on his brow, and his eyes widened strangely. He sprang from the bin, tall, excited, halted in front of me, laid his hand on my shoulder, and said loudly and hastily:

“Wait! Don’t read! . . . Tell me, what’s coming next? No, stop, don’t speak! Do they execute him? Hey? Read quick, Maxím!”

One might have thought that Konováloff instead of Frólka was Rázin’s own brother. It seemed as though certain bonds of blood, unbroken and uncongealed for the space of three centuries, united this tramp with Sténka, and the tramp, with the full strength of his lively, mighty

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body, with all the passion of his soul which was pining without "a point of support," felt the anguish and wrath of the free falcon who had been captured more than three hundred years before.

"Do go on reading, for Christ's sake!"

I read on, aroused and deeply moved, conscious that my heart was beating hard, and in company with Konováloff, living over again Sténka's anguish. And thus we came to the tortures.

Konováloff gnashed his teeth, and his blue eyes blazed like live coals. He leaned over me from behind, and did not take his eyes from the book, any more than I did. His breath buzzed above my ears, and blew my hair into my eyes. I shook my head to put it out of the way. Konováloff noticed this, and laid his heavy palm on my head.

"Then Rázin gnashed his teeth so hard, that he spat them out on the floor, along with the blood . . ."

"Enough!—Go to the devil!" shouted Konováloff, and snatching the book from my hand, he flung it on the floor with all his might, and dropped down after it.

He wept, and, as he was ashamed of his tears, he bellowed in a queer way, in order to keep from sobbing. He hid his head on his knees, and cried, wiping his eyes on his dirty ticking trousers.

I sat in front of him, on the bin, and did not know what to say to console him.

"Maxím!" said Konováloff, as he sat on the floor. "It's awful! Pilá . . . Sysóika. And now Sténka . . . isn't it? What a fate! . . . And how he spit out his teeth! . . . didn't he?"

And he trembled all over with emotion.

He was particularly impressed with the teeth which Sténka spit out, and he kept referring to them, twitching his shoulders with pain as he did so.

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Both of us were like drunken men under the influence of the harsh and poignant picture of the torture thus presented to us.

“Read it to me again, do you hear?” Konováloff entreated, picking up the book from the floor, and handing it to me.—“And, see here now, show me the place where it tells about the teeth?”

I showed him, and he riveted his eyes on the lines.

“So it is written: ‘he spat out his teeth with the blood?’ But the letters are just like all the other letters. . . . O Lord! How it hurt him, didn’t it? Even his teeth. . . . And what will there be at the end? The execution? Aha! Thank the Lord, they execute a man, all the same!”

He expressed his joy over the execution with so much passion, with so much satisfaction in his eyes, that I shuddered at that compassion which so violently desired death for the tortured Sténka.

The whole of that day passed for us in a strange sort of mist: we talked incessantly about Sténka, recalled his life, the songs which had been composed about him, his torments. A couple of times Konováloff began to sing ballads, in a ringing baritone voice, and broke off suddenly.

He and I were closer friends from that day forth.

I read “The Revolt of Sténka Rázin” to him several times more, “Tarás Búlba” \* and “Poor People.”† My

\* N. V. Gogol’s famous kazák epic. Tarás Búlba is an imaginary character. The book has been translated into English by the translator of this book.

† F. M. Dostoévsky’s famous first book. There have been several translations. Makár Dyévushkin and Várya are the principal—almost the only—characters in “Poor People.”

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hearer was also greatly delighted with "Tarás," but it could not obscure the vivid impression made on him by Kostomároff's book. Konováloff did not understand Makár Dyévushkin, and Várya. The language of Makár's letters appeared to him ridiculous, and he bore himself sceptically toward Várya.

"Just look at that, she's making up to the old man! She's a sharp one! . . . And he . . . what a blockhead he was! But see here, Maxím, drop that long-drawn-out thing. What is there to it? He's after her, and she's after him. . . . They ruined a lot of paper . . . well, off with them to the pigs on the farm! It's neither pitiful nor funny: what was it written for?"

I reminded him of the story about the Peasants of Podlípovo, but he did not agree with me.

"Pilá and Sysóika—that's another pattern entirely! They are live people, they live and struggle . . . but what are these? They write letters—they're tiresome! They're not even human beings, but just so-so—a mere invention. Now if you were to put Tarás and Sténka alongside of them . . . Heavens! what feats they would have performed! Then Pilá and Sysóika would have . . . plucked up some spunk, I rather think?"

He had no clear conception of time, and in his imagination, all his beloved heroes existed contemporaneously, only—two of them dwelt in Usólye, one among the "top-knots,"\* on the Vólga. . . . I had great difficulty in

\* The popular nickname, among the Great Russians, for the Little Russians,—*kókhly*. Possibly the term is derived from the fact that the famous kazáks of the Ukráina (Little Russia), known to history as the Zaporózhian kazáks—or the kazáks dwelling "below the rapids" of the Dnyépr river—shaved their heads, and wore only a top-knot of hair.

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convincing him, that, had Pilá and Sysóika “gone down,” following the Káma down-stream, they would not have met Sténka, and that if Sténka had “kept on through the kazáks of the Don and the Top-knots,” he would not have found Búlba there.\*

Konováloff was chagrined when he came to understand the matter. I tried to treat him to the history of Pugatchóff’s revolt,† as I was desirous of observing how he would bear himself toward Emélka. Konováloff rejected Pugatchóff.

“Akh, the branded rascal—just look at him! He sheltered himself under the Tzar’s name, and got up a revolution. . . . How many folks he ruined, the dog! . . . Sténka?—that’s quite another matter, brother. But Pugatchóff, was just a nit, and nothing more. A mighty important mess of victuals, truly! Aren’t there any little books in the style of Sténka? Hunt them up . . . But fling away that calf of a Makár—he isn’t interesting. You’d better read over again, how they executed Sténka.”

On holidays Konováloff and I went off to the river, or the meadows. We took with us a little vódka, some bread, a book, and set off early in the morning “for the free air,” as Konováloff called these excursions.

\* Sténka Rázin, a kazák of the Don, turned pirate, ravaged the Caspian Sea, the shores of Persia, and the Vólga, capturing towns and stirring up a revolt against the government. He was executed in Moscow, in 1671. He is famous, not only in history, but also in legends, in Epic Songs and in ballads.

† Emelyán Pugatchóff, a kazák deserter and Old Ritualist (1773), gave himself out as the Emperor Peter III. With the avowed intention of marching to St. Petersburg, deposing “his wife” (the Empress Katherine II.), and placing “his son” (afterwards the Emperor Paul I.) on the throne, he raised a serious revolt in the Vólga provinces. It was put down, with difficulty, by troops, and Pugatchóff was captured and executed.—*Translator.*

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We were especially fond of going to "the glass factory." For some reason or other, this name had been given to a building which stood at a short distance from the town, in the fields. It was a three-story, stone house, with a ruined roof and broken window-frames, and cellars which were filled, all summer long, with liquid, foul-smelling mud. Greenish-gray in hue, half-ruined, as though it were sinking into the earth, it gazed from the fields at the town with the dark eye-sockets of its distorted windows, and seemed a blind singer of religious ballads, hardly treated by Fate, who had been ejected from the city limits, and was in a very pitiful and dying condition. Year after year, the water, at its flood, undermined this house, but it stood indestructibly firm; covered all over, from roof to foundation, with a green crust of mould, guarded by puddles against frequent visits from the police,—it stood on, and, although it had no roof, it afforded shelter to various shady and homeless individuals.

There were always a great many of them in it; tattered, half-starved, afraid of the light of the sun, they dwelt in this ruin like owls, and Konováloff and I were always welcome guests among them, because both he and I, when we left the bakery, each took with us a loaf of bread, and on our way, purchased a measure of vodka, and a whole tray of "hot-stuff"—liver, lights, heart and tripe. At a cost of two or three rubles we provided a very filling treat for "the glass folks," as Konováloff called them.

They repaid us for these treats by stories, wherein terrible, soul-rending truth was fantastically intermingled with the most ingenuous falsehood. Every tale presented itself to us like a bit of lace, in which the black threads predominated—they represented the truth;—and in which threads of brilliant hues were to be met with—representing

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the falsehood. This lace fell over brain and heart, and oppressed them both painfully, compressing them with its cruel, torturing varied pattern. "The glass folks" loved us, after their own fashion, and almost always were my attentive auditors. One day I read to them: "For whom is Life in Russia Good?"\*, and together with homeric laughter, I heard from them many valuable opinions on that subject.

Every man, who has fought with life, who has been vanquished by it, and who is suffering in the pitiless captivity of its mire, is more of a philosopher than even Schopenhauer himself, because an abstract thought never moulds itself in such an accurate and picturesque form, as does the thought which is directly squeezed out of a man by suffering. The knowledge of life possessed by these people whom life had flung overboard, astonished me by its profundity, and I listened eagerly to their stories, while Konováloff listened to them for the purpose of arguing against the philosophy of the story-teller, and of dragging me into a dispute with himself.

After listening to a story of life and fall, narrated by some fantastically-unclothed fellow, with the physiognomy of a man, with whom one must be strictly on his guard,—after listening to such a story, which always bore the character of a justificatory and defensive statement, Konováloff smiled thoughtfully and shook his head negatively. This was noticed because it was done openly.

"Don't you believe me, Lesá?" exclaimed the story-teller in distress.

"Yes, I believe you . . . How is it possible not to believe a man? And even if you perceive that he is lying, believe him, that is to say, listen, and try to understand

\* By Nekrásóff.—*Translator.*



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why he lies? Sometimes a lie shows up a man better than the truth does. . . . And besides, what truth can any of us tell about ourselves? The nastiest. . . . But one can invent fine things. . . . Isn't that true?"

"Yes . . ." assented the story-teller. . . . "But what were you shaking your head at?"

"What about? Because you reason irregularly. . . . You tell your story in such a way that a fellow is bound to understand that you yourself didn't make your life what it is, but that your neighbors and various passers-by made it. But where were you all that time? And why didn't you offer any resistance to your fate? And the way it turns out is, that we all of us complain about people, yet we are people ourselves, and, of course, others may, also, complain of us. Other people interfere with our lives—and that means that we, also, have interfered with other people's lives, isn't that so? Well, then, how is that to be explained?"

"Such a life must be constructed so that everyone will have plenty of room in it, and no one will interfere with the rest," they sententiously propounded to Konováloff in argument.

"But who ought to construct life?" he retorted triumphantly, and, fearing that they would prove too sharp for him in answering his question, he immediately answered it himself:—"We! We ourselves! And how shall we construct life, if we don't understand it, and our life has not been a success? So it turns out, brethren, that our sole prop is—ourselves! Well, and we all know what we are like . . ."

They replied to him, defending themselves, but he obstinately repeated his opinion: "no one was in anywise to blame concerning them, but each one of us is responsible to himself for himself."

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It was extremely difficult to drive him from his stand on this proposition, and it was extremely difficult for these people to master his point of view. On the one hand, in his presentation of the matter, they appeared fully competent to construct a free life; on the other—they appeared as weak, puny, decidedly incapable of anything, except making complaints of one another.

It very frequently happened that these discussions, begun at mid-day, ended about midnight, and Konoválhoff and I returned from "the glass folks" through the darkness and in mud up to our knees.

One day we came near being drowned in a quagmire; on another, we fell into the hands of the police round-up, and spent the night in the station-house, together with a couple of score of assorted friends from the "glass factory," who turned out to be suspicious characters, from the point of view of the police. Sometimes we did not care to philosophize, and then we went far a-field, in the meadows beyond the river, where there were tiny lakes, abounding in small fish, which entered them at the season of flood-water. Among the bushes, on the shore of one of these lakes, we lighted a bonfire, which we required merely for the purpose of augmenting the beauty of the surroundings, and read a book, or talked about life. And sometimes Konoválhoff would meditatively suggest:

"Maxím! Let's stare at the sky!"

We lay down on our backs, and gazed at the fathomless blue abyss above us. At first, we heard the rustle of wings around us, and the plashing of the water in the lake, we felt the earth under us, and around us everything that was there at the moment. . . . Later on, the blue sky seemed to be gradually drawing us toward it, enfolded our consciousness in mist, we lost the sensation of existence,

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and, as though tearing ourselves away from the earth, we seemed to be floating in the waste expanse of the heavens, finding ourselves in a semi-conscious, contemplative condition, and endeavoring not to disturb it either by a word or a movement.

Thus we would lie for several hours at a stretch, and return home to our work, renewed in body and soul, and refreshed by this union with Nature.

Konováloff loved Nature with a profound, inexpressible love, which was indicated only by the soft gleam of his eyes, and always, when he was in the fields or on the river, he was completely permeated by a certain pacifically-affectionate mood, which still further heightened his resemblance to a little child. Sometimes he said, with a deep sigh, as he gazed at the sky:

“Ekh . . . How good it is!”

And in this exclamation there was always more meaning and feeling than in the rhetorical figures of many poets, who go into raptures more for the sake of maintaining their reputations as persons with an exquisite sense of the beautiful, than out of genuine adoration before the unspeakably caressing beauty of Nature . . .

Like everything else, poetry loses its holy beauty and directness, when it is turned into a profession.

Two months passed, day by day, in the course of which Konováloff and I discussed many things and read a great deal. I read the “Revolt of Sténka” so often to him, that he could narrate it fluently, in his own words, page after page, from beginning to end.

This book had become for him what a fairy-tale sometimes becomes to an impressionable child. He called the objects with which he had to deal by the names of its heroes,

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and when, one day, one of the bread-moulds fell from the shelf and broke, he exclaimed, sadly and angrily:

“Akh you, voevóda!”\*

Unsuccessful bread he nicknamed “Frólka,” the yeast he christened “Sténka’s thoughts”; Sténka himself was the synonym for everything exceptional, huge, unhappy, unsuccessful.

During all this time he hardly alluded to Kapitólina, whose letter I had read, and to whom I had composed a reply, on the first day of our acquaintance.

I knew that Konováloff had sent her money, to the care of a certain Philip, with a request that the latter would act as surety for her to the police, but no answer arrived, either from Philip or from the girl.

And all of a sudden, one evening when Konováloff and I were preparing to place the bread in the oven, the door of the bakery opened, and from out of the darkness of the damp ante-room a low-pitched, feminine voice, which was both timid and irritable, exclaimed:

“Excuse me . . .”

“Whom do you want?” I inquired, while Konováloff, dropping the shovel at his feet, plucked at his beard in confusion.

“Does baker Konováloff work here?”

She now stood on the threshold, and the light of the hanging-lamp fell directly upon her head—on her white woollen kerchief. From beneath the kerchief gazed a round, pretty, snub-nosed little face, with plump cheeks, and dimples in them from the smile of her full, red lips.

“Yes!” I answered her.

“Yes, yes!” Konováloff exulted suddenly and very

\* Sometimes used to mean: “the governor of a province or town”; sometimes, “the commander of an army.”—*Translator.*

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noisily, it seemed, throwing aside his shovel, and hastening forward, with huge strides, toward the visitor.

"Sáshenka!" she sighed deeply, as she advanced to meet him.

They embraced, Konováloff bending low to reach her.

"Well, what now? How did you get here? Have you been here long? Hey? So it's you! Are you free? That's good! Now do you see? I told you . . . your way is open before you again! Go ahead boldly!"—Konováloff hastily explained himself to her, as he still stood on the threshold, without removing his arms, which encircled her neck and waist.

"Maxím . . . you fight it out alone to-day, my boy, while I attend to the ladies' department. . . . Where are you stopping, Kápa?"

"I came straight here to you . . ."

"He-e-ere? You can't possibly stay here—we bake bread here, and . . . it's utterly impossible! Our boss is the strictest sort of a man. I must settle you for the night somewhere . . . in lodgings, say. Come on!"

And they departed. I remained to struggle with the bread, and had no expectation of seeing Konováloff before the next morning; but, to my no small surprise, he made his appearance three hours later. My astonishment was still further increased, when, on glancing at him, with the anticipation of seeing the radiance of joy in his face, I perceived that it was merely cross, bored, and fatigued.

"What's the matter with you?" I asked, intensely interested in this mood of my friend, which was so unsuited to the event.

"Nothing," he replied dejectedly, and, after a pause, he spat with considerable ferocity.

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"No, but all the same? . . ." I persisted.

"Well, what business is it of yours?" he retorted wearily, stretching himself at full length on the bin.—  
"All the same . . . all the same. . . . All the same—she's a woman! There you have the whole thing!"

I had great difficulty in getting an explanation out of him, and, at last, he gave it to me, approximately in the following words:

"I say—she's a woman! And if I hadn't been a fool, nothing would have come of it. You understand? Well . . . Now you say: a woman is also a human being! Of course, she walks on her hind paws, doesn't eat grass, talks with words, laughs . . . in short, she isn't a beast. But, all the same, she's no company for the likes of us men. . . . Ye-es! Why? Well . . . I don't know! I feel that she doesn't fit in, but why—is more than I can understand. . . . Now, there she—Kapi-tólina,—this is the line she takes up:—'I want to live with you'—that means with me—'as your wife. I want,' says she, 'to be your watch-dog. . . .' It's perfectly absurd! 'Come, now, my dear girl,' says I, 'you're a fool; just consider, what will it be like to live with me? In the first place, there's my tippling; in the second place, I have no home; in the third, I am a vagabond, and I can't live in one place . . .' and so forth and so on, with a lot more, says I to her. But she—doesn't care a fig about my tippling. 'All men who work at trades are bitter drunkards,' says she, 'yet they have wives; you'll get a house,' says she, 'when you have a wife, and then you won't run off anywhere. . . .' Says I: 'Kápa, I can't possibly bring myself to do it, because I know that I don't understand how to lead such a life, and I can't learn how.' And says she, 'Then I'll jump into the river!' And says I

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to her: 'You ffo-oo-oll!' Then she took to lashing me with her tongue, and didn't she let it loose! 'Akh, you meddler, you brazen-faced monster, you deceiver, you long-legged devil!' says she. . . . And she started in to rail at me, and rail . . . she simply seemed to be in such a rage at me, that I came near taking to my heels. Then she began to cry. She cried and upbraided me: 'Why did you take me out of that place,' says she, 'if you didn't want me? Why did you lure me away from that place,' says she, 'and where am I to go now?' says she. 'You red-headed fool,' says she. . . . Faugh! Well, and what am I to do with her now?"

"Well, and why did you get her away from that place, as a matter of fact?" I inquired.

"Why? What a queer fellow you are! Because I was sorry for her, apparently! You see, a man gets stuck in the mud . . . and he feels sorry for every passer-by. But set up a wife, and all the rest of it . . . not much! I won't consent to that. What sort of a family man would I make? And if I could stick to that, I would have married long ago. What good chances I have had! I might have married money . . . and all that sort of thing. But if this sort of thing is beyond my power, how am I to do it? She's crying . . . that's not a good thing . . . of course. . . . But what am I to do about it? I can't help it!"

He went so far as to shake his head in confirmation of his plaintive "I can't." He rose from the bin, and ruffling his beard and his hair with both hands, he began to stride about the bakery with drooping head, and spitting in disgust.

"Maxím!" he began, in an entreating, disconcerted way, "couldn't you go to her, sort of tell her the why and how of it . . . hey? Do go, that's a good fellow!"

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“What am I to say to her?”

“Tell her the whole truth!—Say ‘He just can’t do it. It isn’t the right thing for him to do . . .’ And see here, this is what you can say to her . . . tell her . . . ‘there is something the matter with him.’”

“Is that the truth?” I laughed.

“We-ell . . . no, it isn’t the truth. . . . But it’s a good excuse, isn’t it? Akh, devil take you! What a mess a wife is! Isn’t that so? And I never thought of such a thing, not even one little minute. Come, now, what am I to do with a wife?”

He flourished his hands with so much perplexity and terror as he said this, that it was clear he absolutely did not know what to do with a wife! And, despite the comicality of his statement of this whole affair, its dramatic side made me do some hard thinking over the situation of my comrade and of this girl. Meanwhile, he continued to stalk about the bakery, and talk to himself, as it were.

“And she doesn’t please me now, it’s awful how repulsive she is to me! She’s just sucking me in, and dragging me down somewhere, exactly like a bottomless bog. A nice husband you’ve picked out for yourself! You’re not very clever, but you’re a crafty girl.”

This was the instinct of the vagabond beginning to speak in him, aroused by the feeling of eternal striving after his freedom, which had been assailed.

“No, you won’t catch me with that sort of worm, I’m too big a fish for that!” he exclaimed vauntingly.—“This is the way I’ll take it, yes . . . and, after all, what of it?”—And, coming to a halt in the middle of the bakery, he sighed, and fell into thought. I watched the play of expression on his excited countenance, and tried to divine what conclusion he had arrived at.



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“Maxím! Hey, there, let’s be off for the Kubán!”

I had not expected this. I had certain literary—pedagogical designs on him: I cherished the hope of teaching him to read and write, and of imparting to him all that I knew myself at that time. It would have been curious to observe how this experiment would turn out. . . . He had given me his word not to move from the spot for the whole summer; this had lightened my task, and now, all of a sudden . . .

“Now you are talking nonsense!” I said to him, somewhat disconcerted.

“Well, what else is there for me to do?” he cried.

I began to tell him that, in all probability, Kapitólina’s designs on him were not so decidedly serious as he imagined, and that he must watch and wait.

And, as it turned out, he had not so very long to wait.

We were sitting on the floor, with our backs to the windows, and chatting. It was almost midnight, and an hour and a half or two hours had elapsed since Konováloff’s return. All at once, the crash of breaking glass rang out behind us, and a pretty heavy stone thundered noisily down upon the floor beside us. We both sprang to our feet in affright, and rushed to the window.

“I missed fire!” screamed a shrill voice through the opening.—“My aim was bad! If it hadn’t been for that . . .”

“C-cco-ome ’long!” bellowed a fierce bass voice.—“C-cco-ome ’l-long, and I’ll settle him . . . later on!”

A despairing, hysterical, and drunken laugh, shrill and nerve-splitting, floated in from the street through the shattered window.

“It’s she!” said Konováloff, sorrowfully.

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All I had been able to descry, so far, was a pair of legs hanging from the sidewalk into the opening before the window. There they dangled and bobbed about in a queer fashion, the heels striking against the brick wall, as though in search of a support.

"C-co-ome 'long, now!" jabbered the fierce bass voice.

"Let me go! Don't drag me, give me a chance to ease my heart. Good-bye, Sáška! Good-bye . . ." An unprintable curse followed these words.

On approaching closer to the window, I caught sight of Kapitólina. Bending down very low, with her hands propped on the sidewalk, she was trying to look into the bakery, and her dishevelled hair lay in disorder over her shoulders and bosom. The white kerchief was pushed on one side, the bodice of her gown was torn. Kapitólina was horribly drunk, and was reeling from side to side, hiccoughing, cursing, screaming hysterically, trembling all over, her garments all dishevelled, her face red, intoxicated, drenched with tears.

Over her leaned the tall figure of a man, and he, resting one hand on her shoulder, and the other against the wall of the house, kept on roaring:

"C-cco-ome 'long!" . . .

"Sáška! You have ruined me . . . remember that! Curse you, you red-headed devil! May you never behold an hour of God's sunshine! I did hope . . . I should reform . . . you jeered at me, you gallows-bird . . . all right! Let's make up! Ah! . . . He has hid himself! Shame on you, you cursed ugly mug! . . . Sáša . . . dearest . . ."

"I haven't hid myself," said Konováloff, in a deep, thick voice, approaching the window and climbing up on a bin.--"I'm not hiding . . . but there's no use in

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your going on like this . . . I certainly meant kindly by you; it will be a good thing, I thought, but you have rushed off wildly, in the most utterly absurd way . . .”

“Sáshka! Can you kill me?”

“Why did you get drunk? Don’t you know what would have happened . . . to-morrow?” . . .

“Sáshka! Sáshka! Drown me!”

“Sto-o-op that! C-co-ome ’long!”

“You scound-rrrel! Why did you pretend to be a good man?”

“What’s all this noise, hey? Who are you?”

The whistle of the night-watchman interposed in this dialogue, drowned it, then subsided.

“Why did I trust you, you devil! . . .” sobbed the girl under the window.

Then her legs suddenly quivered, flashed upward in haste, and vanished in the gloom. A dull sound of voices and uproar rang out.

“I won’t go to the station-house! Sá-ásha!” shrieked the girl plaintively.

Feet trampled noisily along the pavement.

Whistles, a dull roaring, yells.

“Sá-ásha! Dear man!”

It appeared as though someone were being mercilessly tortured. . . . All these noises retreated from us, grew fainter, duller, and died away, like a nightmare. Stunned, crushed by this scene, which had been enacted with astonishing swiftness, Konováloff and I stared into the street through the darkness, and could not recover ourselves from the weeping, roaring, curses, shouts of the police, groans of anguish. I recalled individual sounds, and could hardly persuade myself that it had all actually taken place. This brief but painful drama had come to an end with terrible rapidity.

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"That's all . . ." said Konováloff, with peculiar gentleness and simplicity, after listening a while longer in silence in the dark night, which gazed silently and sternly in at him through the window.

"How she gave it to me! . . ." he continued with amazement, after the lapse of several seconds, retaining his former attitude on the bin, kneeling and supporting his hands on the slope of the window-sill.—"She has got into the hands of the police . . . drunk . . . in company with some devil or other. She made up her mind quick!" He heaved a deep sigh, descended from the bin, seated himself on the sacks of flour, with his head clasped in his hands, rocked himself to and fro, and asked me, in an undertone:

"Tell me, Maxím, what was it that took place there just now? . . . That is to say, what share have I in it all now?"

I told him. It was all his affair, all the way through. First of all, one must understand what he wants to do, and when he begins a thing, he must set before himself its probable termination. He had not understood this in the least, did not know it, and was thoroughly to blame in every point. I was incensed at him—Kapitólina's groans and cries, that drunken "C-come 'long!" . . . all these things still rang in my ears, and I did not spare my comrade.

He listened to me with bowed head, and when I had finished, he raised it, and on his countenance I read alarm and amazement.

"There you have it!" he exclaimed. . . . "That's clever! Well, and . . . what now? Hey? How is it? What am I to do with her?"

In the tone of his words there was so much purely-

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childish in the sincerity of his confession of his fault toward the girl, and so much helpless astonishment, that I immediately felt sorry for my comrade, and reflected that, possibly, I had spoken very sharply and dictatorially to him.

“And why did I move her from that place?” said Konováloff, regretfully.—“Ekhma! She must be angry with me now . . . for now I have. . . . I’ll go there, to the police-station, and I’ll try . . . I’ll see her—and all the rest of it. I’ll say to her . . . something or other. . . . Shall I go?”

I remarked that not much was likely to come of his seeing her again. What could he say to her? Moreover, intoxicated as she was, she was, probably, fast asleep by this time.

But he fortified himself in his idea.

“I’ll go, just wait. All the same, I wish her well . . . indeed I do. And what sort of people are they for her? I’ll go. . . . Here, you, just . . . I’ll be back before long.”

And putting on his cap, he hastily quitted the bakery, without even donning the boot-slippers, of which he was, generally, so vain.

I finished my work and lay down to sleep, but when I awoke in the morning, and, according to my wont, cast a glance at the place where Konováloff slept, he was not yet there.

He did not make his appearance until toward evening, when he presented himself gloomy, dishevelled, with harsh lines on his brow, and a sort of mist over his blue eyes. Without looking at me, he stepped up to the bins, to see what I had been doing, and then lay down, in silence, upon the floor.

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"Well, did you see her?" I asked.

"That's what I went for."

"Well, what happened?"

"Nothing."

It was plain that he did not wish to talk. Assuming that this mood of his would not last long, I did not bother him with questions. And all that day he maintained silence, only flinging at me curt remarks bearing on the work, when it was absolutely necessary, striding about the bakery with drooping head, and still with the same beclouded eyes with which he had arrived. Something seemed to have been extinguished within him; he worked slowly and languidly, as though held in bondage by his thoughts. At night, when we had already placed the last batch of loaves in the oven, and had not gone to sleep, for fear of their getting over-done, he asked me:

"Come, now, read me something about Sténka."

As the description of the tortures stirred him up more than anything else, I began to read that passage to him. He listened, stretched out motionless upon the floor, breast upward, and stared unwinkingly at the smoke-begrimed vaults of the ceiling.

"Sténka died. So they set one man free," said Konováloff slowly.—"And yet, in those days, a man could live. Life was free. There was somewhere to go, a man could divert his spirit. Now we have silence, and peaceableness . . . order . . . if you look at it so, from one side, life has now even become perfectly peaceful. Books, reading and writing. . . . And, nevertheless, a man lives without protection, and there is no sort of guardianship over him. He sins in a forbidden way, but it is impossible not to sin. . . . For there is order in the streets, but in the soul there is—confusion. And nobody can understand anybody."

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"Sásha! On what terms are you with Kapitólina?" I asked.

"Hey?." He bristled up.—"With Kápa? Enough!"  
. . . He waved his hand with decision.

"That means—you have made an end of it?"

"I? No—she herself has made an end of it."

"How?"

"Very simply. She insisted on her point of view, and wouldn't see any others whatever. . . . Just as before. Only, formerly, she did not drink, and now she has taken to drinking. . . . Take the bread out while I get some sleep."

Silence reigned in the bakery. The lamp smoked, the oven-door cracked from time to time, and the crusts of baked bread on the shelves cracked also, in drying. In the street, opposite our windows, the night-watchmen were chatting. And still another sound, a strange sound, reached the ear, now and then, from the street, like a sign-board creaking somewhere, or someone groaning.

I took out the bread, and lay down to sleep, but I could not get to sleep, and I lent an ear to all the nocturnal sounds, as I lay there, with half-shut eyes. All at once, I beheld Konováloff rise noiselessly from the floor, go to the shelf, take from it Kostomároff's book, open it, and hold it up to his eyes. His thoughtful face was clearly visible to me, and I watched him draw his fingers along the lines, shake his head, turn over a leaf, and again stare intently at it, and then transfer his eyes to me. There was an odd, strained, and interrogative expression on his pensive, sunken face, and this face—an entirely new one to me—he kept turned toward me for a long time.

I could not restrain my curiosity, and asked him what he was doing.

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"Ah, I thought you were asleep . . ." he answered in confusion; then he approached me, holding the book in his hand, sat down beside me, and said, hesitatingly: "You see, I want to ask you about something . . . Isn't there some book or other about the rules of life? That is to say, instruction as to how a man ought to live? I want to have my deeds explained to me—which are injurious, and which are of no consequence. . . . You see, I am troubled about my deeds. . . . A deed which seems to me good at the start, turns out bad in the end. Now, in that matter of Kápa ——" He drew a long breath, and went on with an effort, and inquiringly: "So, won't you search, and see if there isn't a little book about deeds? And read it to me."

Several minutes of silence.

"Maxím!" . . .

"What?"

"How black Kapitólina did paint me!"

"That's all right, now. . . . Say no more about it . . ."

"Of course, it's no matter now. . . . But, tell me . . . was she right?"

This was a ticklish question, but, on reflection, I replied to it in the affirmative.

"There, that's just what I think myself. . . . She was right . . . yes . . ." drawled Konoválóff, sadly, and fell silent.

He fidgeted about for a long time on his mat, which was laid flat on the floor, rose to his feet several times, smoked, sat down by the window, and again lay down.

Then I fell asleep, and when I awoke he was no longer in the bakery, and made his appearance only toward night-fall. He turned out to be covered all over with some sort



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of dust, and in his clouded eyes a fixed expression had congealed. Flinging his cap on a shelf he heaved a sigh, and seated himself by my side.

"Where have you been?"

"I went to take a look at Kápka."

"Well, and what of it?"

"Stop that, brother! Didn't I tell you . . ."

"Evidently, you can't do anything with those people," I said, in the endeavor to dispel his mood, and began to talk about the mighty power of habit, and about everything else which seemed appropriate to the occasion. Konováloff remained obstinately mute, and stared at the floor.

"No, there's no u-use! It is too much for me! I'm simply a man who spreads infection. . . . I have not long to live in this world. . . . Such a woful, poisonous breath emanates from me. And just as soon as I go near a man, he immediately catches the infection from me. And woe is all that I can bring to anyone. . . . For, when you come to think of it, to whom have I ever brought any satisfaction all my life long? To no one! And I've had dealings with a great many people, too. . . . I'm a rotting man."

"That's nonsense . . ."

"No, it's true! . . ." and he nodded his head with conviction.

I tried to convince him of the contrary, but from my remarks he drew still greater certainty as to his unfitness for life.

Altogether, he had begun to undergo a swift, sharp change from the moment of the affair with Kápka. He became meditative, lost his interest in books, did not work with his previous ardor, became taciturn and reserved.

During the intervals of freedom from work, he lay down

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on the floor, and stared fixedly at the vault of the ceiling. His face grew thin, his eyes lost their clear, childlike brilliancy.

"Sásha, what's the matter with you?" I asked him.

"My drunken spree is coming on," he explained simply. —"I shall soon let myself loose . . . that is, I shall begin to gulp down vódka. . . . I'm all on fire inside, already . . . like a burn, you know. . . . The time has come . . . if it hadn't been for that same story, I might have been able to hold out a little longer. But that affair is eating me up. . . . How so? I wanted to do good to a person, and—all of a sudden—it turns out entirely wrong! Yes, brother, a rule for one's deeds is very necessary in life. . . . And couldn't such a set of rules be invented, so that all men might act like one, and everyone might understand the others? For it is utterly impossible to live at such a distance from one another! Don't the wise people understand, that order must be established on the earth, and men must be brought to a clear knowledge? . . . E-ekhma!"

Absorbed in these thoughts as to the indispensability of a rule of life, he did not listen to my remarks. I even noticed that he seemed to hold somewhat aloof from me. One day, after listening for the hundredth time to my project for reorganizing life, he appeared to become enraged with me.

"Well, devil take you. . . . I've heard of that before. . . . The point doesn't lie in life, but in man. The first thing is . . . the man . . . do you understand? Well, and there's nothing more to it. . . . So, according to you, it appears, that until all this has been made over, man, all the same, must remain just as he is now. Also . . . . No, you make him over first, show

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him his way. . . . Let things be bright and not cramped for him on the earth—that's what you must seek after for man. Teach him to find his path. . . . But that stuff of yours is . . . mere fiction."

I retorted, he waxed hot or grew surly, and exclaimed wearily:

"Eh, do stop!"

One day it chanced that he went away in the evening, and did not return at night to work, nor the following day. In his place, the proprietor made his appearance with a troubled face, and announced:

"Our Leksákha has gone off on a carouse. He's sitting in 'The Little Wall.' We must hunt up a new baker . . ."

"But perhaps he will recover himself?!"

"Well, of course, just wait . . . I know him . . ."

I went to "The Little Wall"—a dram-shop cleverly constructed in a stone wall. It was distinguished by the peculiarity that it had no windows, and that the light fell into it through a hole in the ceiling. As a matter of fact, it was a square pit, excavated in the ground, and covered overhead with boards. An earthy odor forever reigned within it, along with cheap, domestic tobacco, and vódka grown bitter with age—a symphony of odors which made one's head ache horribly after half an hour's sojourn among them. But the steady patrons of this den were accustomed to it—they were shady people, with no definite occupations—as they became accustomed to a mass of things which are intolerable to a man. And there they stuck, for whole days at a time, waiting for some artisan on a spree, that they might ply him with drink until he was stark naked.

Konováloff was sitting at a large table in the centre of the dram-shop, surrounded by a circle of six gentlemen, in fan-

## Konováloff

tastically-tattered costumes, with faces like those of the heroes of Hoffmann's "Tales," who were listening to him with respectful and flattering attention.

They were drinking beer and vódka together, and eating something which resembled dry lumps of clay.

"Drink, my lads, drink, each one as much as he can. I have money and clothing. . . . They'll last three days in all. I'll drink up everything and . . . enough! I don't want to work any more, and I don't want to live here."

"It's the nastiest sort of a town," remarked someone, who looked like Sir John Falstaff.

"Work?" inquired another, with a surprised and interrogative stare at the ceiling.—"And was man born into this world for that?"

Then all of them began to yell at once, demonstrating to Konováloff his right to drink up everything, and even elevating that right to the rank of an express obligation—to drink away his all precisely with them.

"Ah, Maxím," jested Konováloff, on catching sight of me.—"Come on, now, you book-reader and pharisee, take your whack! I've jumped the track for good, my lad. Don't say a word! I mean to drink until I haven't a stitch of clothes to my back. . . . When nothing is left on my body but the hair, I'll stop. Pitch in, too, won't you?"

He was not drunk, as yet, but his blue eyes flashed with desperate excitement and sorrow, and his luxuriant beard, which fell over his chest in a silky fan, kept moving to and fro, because his lower lip was twitching with a nervous quiver. His shirt-collar was unbuttoned, tiny drops of perspiration gleamed on his forehead, and the hand which he stretched out to me with a glass of liquor shook.

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"Drop it, Sásha, let's leave this place together," I said, laying my hand on his shoulder.

"Drop it? . . ." he burst out laughing.—"If you had come to me ten years ago and said that . . . perhaps I would have dropped it. But now it's better for me not to drop it. . . . What else is there for me to do? What? You see, I feel, I feel every movement of life . . . but I can't understand anything, and I don't know my way . . . I feel . . . and I drink, because there's nothing else I can do. . . . Have a drink!"

His companions stared at me with open disapproval, and all twelve of their eyes surveyed my figure with anything but a conciliatory air.

The poor fellows were afraid that I would carry off Konováloff,—and the treat, which they had been awaiting, perhaps, for a whole week.

"Brethren! This is my chum . . . a learned fellow, devil take him! Maxím, can you read to us here about Sténka? . . . Akh, comrades, what books there are in the world! About Pilá? . . . Hey, Maxím! . . . Comrades, it isn't a book, but blood and tears. But, you know, Pilá . . . that's myself? Maxím! . . . And Sysóika, I . . . By God! Now it's plain to me!"

He stared at me with widely-opened eyes, in which lay terror, and his lower lip quivered strangely. The company, not very willingly, made room for me at the table. I sat down beside Konováloff, just at the moment when he seized a glass of beer and vódka, half and half.

Evidently, he wished to stun himself as speedily as possible with this mixture. After taking a drink, he picked up from his plate a piece of the stuff which looked like clay, but was really boiled meat, inspected it, and flung it over his shoulder against the wall of the dram-shop.

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The company grumbled in an undertone, like a pack of hungry dogs over a bone.

"I'm a lost man. . . . Why did my mother and father bring me into the world? Nothing is known . . . Darkness! Stifling closeness! That's all. . . . Good-bye, Maxim, if you won't drink with me. I won't go to the bakery. I have some money owing me from the boss—get it, and give it to me, I'll spend it for liquor. . . . No! Take it yourself, for books. . . . Will you take it? You don't want to? Then don't. . . . But won't you take it? You're a pig, if that's the case. . . . Get away from me! G-go a-way!"

He was getting intoxicated, and his eyes gleamed fiercely.

The company was quite ready to fling me out from among them by the scruff of the neck, and I, not caring to wait for that, took myself off.

Three hours later I was again in "The Little Wall." Konováloff's party had been augmented by two men. They were all drunk, he—the least of all. He was drinking with his elbows resting on the table, and staring at the sky through the opening in the ceiling. The drunken men were listening to him, in various attitudes, and several of them were hiccoughing.

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Konováloff was singing in a baritone voice, which passed into a falsetto on the high notes, as is the case with all artisan singers. Supporting his cheek on his hand, he was feelingly producing mournful roulades, and his face was pale with emotion, his eyes were half closed, his throat was curved forward. Eight drunken, senseless, crimson faces were gazing at him, and only from time to time did the muttering and hiccoughing make themselves heard. Konováloff's voice vibrated and wept, and moaned, and it was a

## Konoválhoff

sight pitiful to the verge of tears, to behold this magnificent fellow singing his melancholy lay.

The heavy smell, the sweaty, drunken, ugly faces, two smoking kerosene lamps and the planks which formed the walls of the dram-shop, black with dirt and soot, its earthen floor and the twilight which filled that pit—all these things were gloomy and painfully fantastic. It seemed as though men who had been buried alive were banqueting in a sepulchre, and one of them was singing, for the last time, before his death, and bidding farewell to the sky. Hopeless sadness, calm despair, everlasting anguish resounded in my comrade's song.

"Is Maxim here? Do you want to come with me as my assistant officer of bandits? Go, my friend! ——" he said, breaking off his elegy, as he offered me his hand. . . . "I'm all ready, my lad! . . . I've collected a gang for myself . . . here it is . . . there'll be more men later on. . . . We'll find them! This is n-nothing! We'll call ourselves Pilá and Sysóika. . . . And we'll feed them every day on buckwheat groats and roast beef . . . isn't that good? Will you go? Take your books with you . . . you shall read about Sténka and about other people. . . . Friend! Akh, I'm disgusted, I'm disgusted . . . dis-gus-ted! . . ."

He banged his fist down on the table, with all his might. The glasses and bottle rattled, and the company, recovering its senses, immediately filled the dram-shop with an uproar which was frightful in its indecency.

"Drink, my lads!" shouted Konoválhoff. "Drink! Ease your hearts . . . do your uttermost!"

I retreated from them, stood in the door which opened on the street, listened to Konoválhoff orating with a twisting tongue, and when he began to sing again, I went off

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to the bakery, and his uncouth, drunken song moaned and wept after me for a long time in the nocturnal stillness.

Two days later, Konováloff vanished from the town.

I happened to encounter him again.

A man must have been born in cultured society, in order to find within himself the patience necessary to live out the whole of his life in the midst of it, and never once desire to escape somewhere, away from the sphere of all those oppressive conventions, legalized by custom, of petty, malicious lies, from the sphere of sickly self-conceit, of sectarianism of ideas, of all sorts of insincerity,—in a word, from all that vanity of vanities which chills the emotions, and perverts the mind. I was born and reared outside that circle of society, and for that reason—a very agreeable one to me—I cannot take in its culture in large doses, without a downright necessity of getting out of its framework cropping up in me, and of refreshing myself, in some measure, after the extreme intricacy and unhealthy refinement of that existence.

In the country it is almost as intolerably tedious and dull as it is among educated people. The best thing one can do is to betake himself to the dives of the towns, where, although everything is filthy, it is still simple and sincere, or to set out for a walk over the fields and roads of his native land, which is extremely curious, affords great refreshment, and requires no outfit except good legs with plenty of endurance.

Five years ago I undertook precisely that sort of a trip, and as I tramped across holy Russia, without any definite plan of march, I chanced to reach Feodósia. At that time they were beginning to build the jetty there, and, in the expectation of earning a little money for my journey, I be-



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took myself to the spot where construction was under way.

Being desirous of taking a look at the work first, as a picture, I climbed a hill and seated myself there, gazing down upon the boundless, mighty sea, and the tiny men who were forging fetters for it.

An extensive picture of man's labor was spread out before me:—the whole rocky shore along the bay was dug up, there were holes and piles of stone and lumber everywhere, wheelbarrows, strips of iron, pile-drivers, and some other constructions of beams, and among all these things men were hastening to and fro in every direction. After having ripped up the mountain with dynamite, they were breaking it into small pieces with pickaxes, clearing a space for a line of railway, they were mixing cement in vast mortar-pits, and making out of it stones almost a fathom in cubic measurement, lowering them into the sea, erecting upon them a rampart against the titanic strength of its turbulent waves. They seemed as tiny as worms against the background of the dark-brown hill, disfigured by their hands, and like worms they swarmed busily about among the heaps of rubbish, and bits of wood in fragment of stone dust, and in the sultry heat, reaching to thirty degrees \* of the southern day. The chaos around them, and the red-hot sky above them, imparted to them the appearance of being engaged in burrowing into the hill, trying to escape into its bosom from the fervor of the sun and the melancholy picture of destruction which surrounded them.

In the suffocating air hung a mighty moaning murmur and uproar, the blows of masons' hammers on stone, the wheels of the barrows screeched dolefully, iron pile-drivers

\* Réaumur. Feodósia is on the shore of the Black Sea, in the Crimea. 30° Réau. = 84° Fahrenheit.—*Translator*.

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descended upon the wood of the piles, the ballad of "The Little Oaken Cudgel" wailed out, the axes tapped away as they rough-hewed the beams, and the dark, and gray, bustling little figures of men shouted in all tones.

In one spot, a cluster of them, loudly chanting "heave-ho!", were handling a huge fragment of rock, endeavoring to move it from its resting-place; in another spot, a heavy beam was being raised, and the men were shouting as they strained:

"Ca-a-atch ho-old!"—And the mountain, furrowed with cracks, repeated dully: "Hold-old-old!"

Along a broken line of boards, flung down here and there, moved a long file of men, bending low over their barrows loaded with stone, and coming slowly to meet them, with empty barrows, was another file, who were dragging out one minute of rest into two. . . . By one of the pile-drivers stood a dense, motley-hued throng of men, and one of them was singing in a long-drawn, plaintive voice:

"Ee-ekhma, comrades, 'tis awfully hot!  
Ee-ekh! On us no one has pity!  
O-oï there, little oaken cu-ud-ge-el,  
He-eave-ho-o!"

The throng hummed mightily, as they hauled away on the cables, and the piece of cast-iron, flying up through the pipe of the pile-driver, fell thence, giving out a dull, groaning sound, and the whole pile-driver quivered.

On every spot of the open space between the mountain and the sea tiny gray people hurried to and fro, filling the air with their shouts, with dust, and the sour odor of man. Among them overseers were walking about, clad in white duck coats with metal buttons, which shone in the sun like someone's cold eyes. Over them were the cloudless, mercilessly-hot heaven, volumes of dust and waves of sounds—

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the symphony of toil, the only music which does not afford delight.

The sea stretched out to the misty horizon, and softly plashed its transparent billows against the strand, so full of sound and movement. All gleaming in the sunlight, it seemed to be smiling, with the good-natured smile of a Gulliver, conscious that, if he so wished, with one movement he could cause all the work of the Lilliputians to disappear.

There it lay, dazzling the eyes with its radiance—great, powerful, kind, and its mighty breath blew upon the beach, refreshing the weary men who were toiling to put a restraint upon the freedom of its waves, which now were so gently and musically caressing the disfigured shore. It seemed to feel sorry for them:—its centuries of existence had taught it to understand, that those who build are not the ones who cherish evil designs against it; it long ago found out that they are only slaves, that their part is to wrestle with the elements face to face. And in this struggle, the vengeance of the elements awaits them. All they do is to build, they toil on forever, their sweat and blood are the cement of all the constructions on the earth; but they receive nothing for this, though they yield up all their forces to the eternal propensity to construct—a propensity which creates marvels on the earth, but, nevertheless, gives men no blood, and too little bread. They also are elementary forces, and that is why the sea gazes, not angrily but graciously, upon their labors from which they derive no profit. These gray little worms, who have thus excavated the mountain, are just the same thing as its drops, which are the first to fall upon the cold and inaccessible cliffs of the shore, in the eternal effort of the sea to extend its boundaries, and the first to perish as they are dashed in fragments against these crags. In the mass, too, these drops

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are nearly related to it, since they are exactly like the sea, as mighty as it, as inclined to destruction, so soon as the breath of the storm is wafted over them. In days of yore the sea also was acquainted with the slaves, who erected pyramids in the desert, and the slaves of Xerxes, that ridiculous man, who undertook to chastise the sea with three hundred lashes, because it had destroyed his toy bridges. Slaves have always been exactly alike, they have always been submissive, they have always been ill-fed, and they have always accomplished the great and the marvelous, sometimes enriching those who have set them to work, most frequently cursing them, rarely rising up in revolt against their masters . . .

And, smiling with the calm smile of a Titan who is conscious of his strength, the sea fanned with its vivifying breath the earth, that Titan which is still spiritually blind, and enslaved and wofully riddled, instead of aspiring to affinity with heaven. The waves ran softly up the beach, sprinkled with a throng of men, engaged in constructing a stone barrier to their eternal motion, and as they ran they sang their ringing, gracious song about the past, about everything which, in the course of the ages, they have beheld on the shores of earth. . . .

Among the laborers there were certain strange, spare, bronze figures, in scarlet turbans, in fezzes, in short blue jackets, and in trousers which were tight about the lower leg, but with full seats. These, as I afterward learned, were Turks from Anatolia. Their guttural speech mingled with the slow, drawling utterance of the men from Vyátka, with the strong, quick phrases of the Bulgarians, with the soft dialect of the Little Russians.

In Russia people were dying of starvation, and the famine had driven hither representatives of nearly all the

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provinces which had been overtaken by this disaster. They had separated into little groups, in the endeavor of the natives of each place to cling together, and only the cosmopolitan tramps were immediately discernible by their independent aspect, and costumes, and their peculiar turn of speech, which was that of men who still remained under the dominion of the soil, having only temporarily severed their connection with it, who had been torn from it by hunger, and had not yet forgotten it. They were in all the groups: both among the Vyátkans and among the Little Russians they felt themselves at home, but the majority of them were assembled round the pile-driver, because the work there was light, in comparison with the work of the barrow-men and of the diggers.

When I approached them, they were standing with their hands released from a hawser, waiting for the contractor to repair something connected with the pulley of the pile-driver, which, probably, was "eating into" the rope. He was poking about up aloft on the wooden tower, and every now and then he would shout down:

"Give way!"

Then they would tug lazily at the rope.

"Stop! . . . Give way once more! Stop! Go ahead!"

The leader of the singing,—a young fellow, long unshaved, with a pock-marked face and a soldierly air,—shrugged his shoulders, squinted his eyes to one side, cleared his throat, and started up:

"Into the earth the pile-driver rams the stake . . ."

The verse which followed would not pass muster with even the most lenient censor, and evoked an unanimous burst of laughter, which, evidently, proved that it was an

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impromptu, composed on the spot by the singer, who, as his comrades laughed, twirled his mustache with the air of an artist who is accustomed to that sort of success with his audience.

“Go a-he-ead!” roared the contractor fiercely from the summit of the pile-driver.—“Stop your neighing! . . .”

“Don’t gape, Mítritch,—you’ll burst!”—one of the workmen warned him.

The voice was familiar to me, and somewhere or other I had seen before that tall, broad-shouldered figure, with the oval face, and large, blue eyes. Was it Konováloff? But Konováloff had not the scar running from the right temple to the bridge of the nose, which intersected the lofty brow of this young fellow; Konováloff’s hair was of a lighter hue, and did not crisp in such small curls as this fellow’s; Konováloff had a handsome, broad beard, but this man was clean-shaven as to his chin, and wore a thick mustache, whose ends drooped downward, in Little Russian fashion. Yet, nevertheless, there was something about him which I knew well. I made up my mind to enter into conversation with him, in particular, as the person to whom I should apply, in order to “get a job,” and assumed a waiting attitude, until they should have finished driving the pile.

“O-o-ukh! O-o-okh!”—the crowd heaved a mighty sigh as they squatted down, hauled away on the ropes, and again swiftly straightened themselves up, as though on the point of tearing themselves from the ground, and taking flight through the air. The pile-driver steamed and quivered, above the heads of the crowd rose their bare, sun-burned, hairy arms, hauling in unison on the rope; their muscles swelled out like wens, but the piece of cast-iron, twenty puds in weight,\* flew upwards to a constantly

\* Seven hundred and twenty pounds.—*Translator.*

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lessening height, and its blow upon the wood sounded more and more faintly. Anyone watching this work might have thought that this was a throng of idolaters, engaged in prayer, uplifting their arms, in despair and ecstasy, to their silent God, and bowing down before him. Their faces, bathed in sweat, dirty, strained in expression, with dishevelled hair, which clung to their damp brows, their light-brown necks, their shoulders quivering with intensity of effort,—all those bodies, barely covered with tattered shirts and trousers of motley hues, filled the air roundabout them with their hot exhalations, and melting together in one heavy mass of muscles, moved restlessly about in the humid atmosphere, impregnated with the sultriness of the southland, and the dense odor of sweat.

“Enough!”—shouted someone, in an angry, cracked voice.

The hands of the workmen dropped the ropes, and they hung limply down the sides of the pile-driver, while the laborers sank down heavily, where they stood, upon the ground, wiping away the sweat, breathing hard, feeling of their shoulders, and filling the air with a dull murmur, which resembled the roaring of a huge, irritated wild beast.

“Fellow-countryman!”—I addressed myself to the young fellow whom I had picked out.

He turned indolently toward me, ran his eyes over my face, and puckering them up, stared intently at me.

“Konováloff!”

“Hold on . . .” he thrust my head backward with his hand, exactly as though he were about to seize me by the throat, and suddenly lighted up all over with a joyful, kindly smile.

“Maxím! Akh—curse you! My friend . . . hey? And so you have broken loose from your career? You

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have enlisted in the barefoot brigade? Well, that's good! Now, it's truly fine! A vagabond—and that's all there is to it! Have you been so long? Where do you come from? Now you and I will tramp all over the earth! What a life . . . that there behind us, isn't it? Downright misery, long drawn out; you don't live, you rot! But I've been roaming the fair world ever since then, my boy. What places I've been in! What air I have breathed. . . . No, you've improved cleverly . . . one wouldn't know you again: from your clothing, one would think you a soldier, from your phiz, a student! Well, what do you think of it, isn't it fine to live so . . . moving from place to place? For, you see, I remember Sténka . . . and Tarás, and Pilá . . . everything."

He punched me in the ribs with his fist, slapped me on the shoulder with his broad palm, exactly as though he were preparing a beefsteak out of me. I could not interpose a single word into the volley of his questions, and only smiled,—very foolishly, in all probability,—as I gazed at his kind face, which was radiant with satisfaction over our meeting. I, also, was very glad to see him; this meeting with him recalled to me the beginning of my life, which, undoubtedly, was better than its continuation.

At last, I managed, somehow, to ask my old friend, whence came that scar on his brow and those curls on his head.

"Why that, you see . . . was a scrape. I undertook, with a couple of my chums, to make my way across the Roumanian frontier; we wanted to take a look at things in Roumania. Well, so we set out from Kalúga,—which is a small place in Bessarábia, close to the frontier. We went quietly on our way—by night, of course. All of a sudden: 'Halt!' The custom-house cordon had crawled



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straight down on it. Well, of course, we took to our heels! Then one insignificant little soldier hit me a whack over the pate. He didn't strike very hard, but, nevertheless, I lay in hospital about a month. And what an affair it was! It turned out that the soldier was from the same part of the country as myself! We were both Muróm men. . . . He was brought to the hospital, too, not long after—a smuggler had spoiled him by sticking a knife into his belly. We made it up between us, and got things straightened out. The soldier asks me: 'Did I slash you?'—'It must have been you, since you confess it.'—'I had to,' says he; 'don't you cherish a grudge,' says he, 'that's part of our service. We thought you were travelling with smuggled goods. Here,' says he, 'this is the way they treated me—they ripped my belly open. It can't be helped; life is a serious game.'—Well, and so he and I struck up a friendship. He was a good little soldier—was Yáshka Mázin. . . . And my curls? Curls? The curls, my boy, came after the typhoid fever. I've had the typhoid fever. They put me in jail in Kishinéff, with the intention of trying me for crossing the frontier illegally, and there I developed typhoid fever. . . . I lay there and lay there with it, and came near never getting up from it. And, in all probability, I shouldn't have recovered, only the nurse took a great deal of pains with me. I was simply astonished, my boy—she fussed over me as though I were a baby, and what did she care about me? 'Márya Petróvna,' I used to say to her, 'just drop that; I'm downright ashamed.' But she only kept laughing. She was a nice girl. . . . She sometimes read me soul-saving books. 'Well, now,' says I, 'aren't there any books,' says I, 'like . . . .' you know the sort. She brought a book about an English sailor, who was saved from a shipwreck

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on an uninhabited island, and created a new life for himself there. It was interesting, awfully interesting! That book pleased me greatly; I'd have liked to go there, to him. You understand, what sort of a life it was? An island, the sea, the sky,—you live there alone by yourself, and you have everything and you are entirely free! There was a savage there, too. Well, I'd have drowned the savage—what the devil should I want him for, hey? I don't get bored all alone. Have you read any such book?"

"Wait. Well, and how did you get out of prison?"

"They let me out. They tried me, acquitted me, and released me. It was very simple. . . . See here, I won't work any more to-day, devil take it! It's all right, I've rattled my arms round hard enough, and it's time to stop. I have three rubles on hand, and for this half day's work I shall get forty kopeks.\* See what a big capital! That means that you're to come home to where we live. We're not in the barracks, but yonder, in the vicinity of the town . . . there's a hole there, so very convenient for human habitation. . . . Two of us have our quarters in it, but my chum is ailing . . . he's bothered with fever. . . . Well, now, you sit here while I go to the contractor . . . I'll be back soon!"

He rose swiftly, and walked off just at the moment when the men who were driving piles took hold of the ropes, and began their work. I remained sitting on a stone, looking at the noisy bustle which reigned around me, and at the blue-green sea. Konováloff's tall form, slipping swiftly among the laborers, the heaps of stone, lumber, and barrows, vanished in the distance. He walked, flourishing his hands, clad in a blue creton blouse, which was too short and too tight for him, crash drawers, and heavy boot-slippers.

\* About half these amounts in dollars and cents.—*Translator.*

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His cap of chestnut curls waved over his huge head. From time to time he turned round, and made some sort of signals to me with his hands. He was so entirely new, somehow, so animated, calmly confident, amiable, and powerful. Everywhere around him men were at work, wood was cracking, stone was being laid, barrows were screeching dolefully, clouds of dust were rising, something fell with a roar, and men were shouting and swearing, sighing and singing as though they were groaning. Amid all this confusion of sounds and movements, the handsome figure of my friend, as it retreated from it with firm strides, constantly tacking from side to side, stood out very sharply, and seemed to present a hint of something which explained Konováloff.

Three hours after we met, he and I were lying in the "hole, very convenient for human habitation." As a matter of fact, the "hole" was extremely convenient—stone had been taken out of the mountain at some distant period, and a large, rectangular niche had been hewn out, in which four persons could have lodged with perfect comfort. But it was low-studded, and over its entrance hung a block of stone, which formed a sort of pent-house, so that, in order to get into the hole, one was forced to lie flat on the ground in front of it, and then shove himself in. It was seven feet in depth, but it was not necessary to crawl into it head foremost, and, indeed, this was risky, for the block of stone over the entrance might slide down, and completely bury us there. We did not wish this to happen, and managed in this way: we thrust our legs and bodies into the hole, where it was very cool, but left our heads out in the sun, in the opening of the hole, so that if the block of stone should take a notion to fall, it would crush only our skulls.

The sick tramp had got the whole of himself out into

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the sun, and lay a couple of paces from us, so that we could hear his teeth chattering in a paroxysm of fever. He was a long, gaunt Little Russian: "from Piltáva, and, prehaps, from Kíeff . . ." he told me pensively.\*

"A man lives so much in the world, that it's of no consequence if he does forget where he was born . . . and what difference does it make, anyway? It's bad enough to be born, and knowing where . . . doesn't make it any the better!"

He rolled about on the ground, in the endeavor to wrap himself as snugly as possible in a gray overcoat, patched together out of nothing but holes, and swore very picturesquely, when he perceived that all his efforts were futile—he swore, but continued to wrap himself up. He had small, black eyes, which were constantly puckered up, as though he were inspecting something very intently.

The sun baked the backs of our necks intolerably, and Konováloff constructed from my military cloak something in the nature of a screen, driving sticks into the ground, and stretching my costume over them. Still, it was stifling. From afar there was wafted to us the dull roar of toil on the bay, but we did not see it; to the right of us, on the shore, lay the town in heavy masses of white houses, to our left—was the sea,—in front of us, the sea again, extending off into immeasurable distance, where marvellous, tender colors, never before beheld, which soothed the eye and the soul by the indescribable beauty of their tints, were intermingled, through soft half-tones, into a fantastic mirage.

\* "Piltáva," for Poltáva; and "prehaps" are respectively, actual and approximated specimens of the Little Russian pronunciation; though this brief sentence contains a third not easily reproduced.—*Translator.*

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Konováloff gazed in that direction, smiled blissfully, and said to me:

“When the sun has set, we will light up a bonfire, and boil some water for tea: we have bread, and meat. But, in the meanwhile, would you like a cantaloupe or a watermelon?”

With his foot he rolled a watermelon out from a corner of the hole, pulled a knife out of his pocket, and as he operated upon the watermelon with it, he remarked: “Every time that I am by the sea, I keep wondering why so few people settle down near it. They would be the better for it, because it is soothing and sort of . . . good thoughts come from it into a man’s soul. But come, tell how you have been living yourself all these years.”

I began to tell him. He listened; the ailing Little Russian paid no attention whatever to us, as he roasted himself in the sun, which was already sinking into the sea. And in the far distance, the sea was already covered with crimson and gold, and out of it, to meet the sun, rose clouds of a pinkish-smoke color, with soft outlines. It seemed as though mountains with white peaks, sumptuously adorned with snow and rosy in the rays of the sunset, were rising from the depths of the sea. From the bay floated the mournful melody of “The Little Oaken Cudgel,” and the roar of blasts of dynamite, which were destroying the mountain. . . . The rocks and inequalities of the soil in front of us cast shadows on the ground, and these, as they imperceptibly lengthened, crept over us.

“It’s downright no good for you to haunt the towns, Maxím,”—said Konováloff persuasively, after he had listened to my epic narrative.—“And what is it that draws you to them? The life there is tainted and close. There’s neither air, nor space, nor anything else that a man needs.

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People? What the devil do you want with them? You're an intelligent man, you can read and write, what are people to you? What do you need from them? And then, there are people everywhere . . . ."

"Ehe!" interposed the Little Russian, as he writhed on the ground like an adder.—"There are people everywhere . . . lots of them; a man can't pass to his own place without treading on their feet. Why, they are born in countless numbers! They're like mushrooms after a shower . . . and even the gentry eat them!" He spat philosophically, and again began to chatter his teeth.

"Well, so far as you are concerned, I say it again,"—continued Konováloff,—"don't you live in the towns. What is there there? Nothing but ill-health and disorder. Books? Well, I think you must have read books enough by this time! You certainly weren't born for that. . . . Yes, and books are—trash! Well, buy one, and put it in your wallet, and start out. Do you want to go to Tashként with me? Or to Samarkánd, or where? . . . And then we'll have a try at the Amúr—is it a bargain? I, my boy, have made up my mind to walk over the earth in various directions—that's the very best thing to do. . . . You walk along, and you're always seeing something new. . . . And you don't think of anything. . . . The breeze blows in your face, and it seems to drive all sorts of dust out of the soul. You feel light-hearted and free. . . . Nobody interferes with you: if you feel hungry, you come to a halt, and earn half a ruble by some sort of work; if there isn't any work, you ask for bread, and you'll get it. In that way, you'll see a great deal of the world, at any rate. . . . All sorts of beauty. . . . Come on!"

The sun set. The clouds over the sea darkened, the sea

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also grew dim, and wafted forth a refreshing coolness. Here and there stars shone out, the hum of toil on the bay ceased, and only now and then were exclamations of the men, soft as sighs, borne thence to us. And when the light breeze breathed upon us, it brought with it the melancholy sound of the breaking of the waves against the shore.

The nocturnal gloom speedily grew more dense, and the figure of the Little Russian, which five minutes previously had perfectly definite outlines, now looked like nothing but an uncouth clod . . .

“We ought to have a fire . . .” he said, coughing.

“We will . . .”

Konováloff pulled out a pile of chips from somewhere or other, set fire to them with a match, and thin tongues of flame began caressingly to lick the yellow, resinous wood. Slender streams of smoke curled through the night air, filled with the moisture and freshness of the sea. And everything grew quieter round about: . . . life seemed to have withdrawn from us somewhither, and its sounds melted and were extinguished in mist. The clouds dispersed, stars began to glitter in the dark-blue sky, and upon the velvety surface of the sea, also, faintly flickered the tiny lights of fishing-boats, and the reflections of the stars. The fire in front of us blossomed out, like a huge, reddish-yellow flower. . . . Konováloff thrust the teapot into it, and clasping his knees, began to stare thoughtfully into the blaze. And the Little Russian, like a big lizard, crawled up, and lay down near it.

“People have built towns, houses, have assembled together there in heaps, and defile the earth, sigh, crowd one another. . . . A nice life that! No, this is life, this, such as we . . .”

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“Oho!”—the Little Russian shook his head,—“if we could only manage to get a fur coat, or a warm hut in it for the winter, we’d live like lords . . .” He screwed up one eye, and looked at Konováloff, with a laugh.

“We-ell,” said the latter abashed,—“winter—is . . . a thrice-accursed time. Towns really are needed for the winter . . . you can’t get along without them. . . . But the big towns are no good, all the same. . . . Why cram people into such heaps, when two or three can’t get along together?—That’s what I was talking about. Of course, when you come to think of it, there’s no room for a man either in the town, or in the steppe, or anywhere else. But it’s better not to think of such things . . . you can’t think out anything, and you only harrow your soul . . .”

Up to this point I had thought that Konováloff had been changed by his vagrant life, that the excrescences of sadness which were on his heart during the first period of our acquaintance had fallen away from him, like a husk, from the action of the free air which he had breathed during those years; but the tone of his last phrase rehabilitated before me my friend as still the same man, seeking a point of support for himself, whom I had known before. The same rust of ignorance in the face of life, and venom of thoughts about it, were still corroding that powerful form, which had been born, to its misfortune, with a sensitive heart. There are many such “meditative” people in Russian life, and they are all more unhappy than anyone else, because the heaviness of their meditations is augmented by the blindness of their minds. I gazed with compassion on my friend, but he, as though confirming my thought, exclaimed, sadly:

“I have recalled that life of ours, Máxim, and all that—



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took place there. How much ground I have covered since then in my roamings, how much, of all sorts, I have seen . . . No, for me there is nothing suitable on earth! I have not found my place!”

“Then why were you born with a neck that no yoke will fit?” inquired the Little Russian indifferently, taking the boiling teapot out of the fire.

“No, do you tell me, . . .” inquired Konováloff,—why I can’t be easy? Hey? Why do people live on, and feel all right, busy themselves with their affairs, have wives, children, and all the rest of it . . . they complain of life, but they are easy. And they always want to do this, that, or the other. But I—can’t. Why do things disgust me?”

“There’s that man jawing,”—remarked the Little Russian in surprise.—“Well, will you feel any the easier for your jawing?”

“That’s so, . . .” assented Konováloff sadly.

“I always say little, but I know what I’m talking about,” uttered the stoic, with a consciousness of his own dignity, yet without ceasing to contend with his fever.

“Let’s drop that subject. . . . I was born, well, that means, live on, and don’t argue . . .” said Konováloff, this time viciously.

The Little Russian considered it necessary to add:

“And don’t force yourself anywhere; the time will come when, without your will, you must be dragged in and ground to dust. . . . Lie still, and hold your tongue. . . . Neither our tongues nor our hands are of any help to us . . .”

He articulated this, began to cough, wriggled about, and took to spitting into the fire with exasperation. Around us everything was obscure, curtained with a thick veil of

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gloom. The sky above us was dark, also, the moon had not yet risen. We felt rather than saw the sea—so dense was the mist in front of us. It seemed as though a black fog had been lowered over the earth. The fire went out . . .

“Let’s lie down to sleep?” suggested the Little Russian.

We made our way into the “hole,” and lay down, with our heads thrust out into the open air. We were silent. Konováloff remained motionless, as though turned to stone, in the attitude in which he lay down. The Little Russian thrashed about incessantly, and his teeth kept chattering. I stared, for a long while, at the smouldering coals of the fire: at first brilliant and large, the coals gradually grew smaller, became covered with ashes, and disappeared beneath them. And soon nothing was left of the fire, except the warm odor. I gazed and thought:

“We are all of us like that. . . . The point is, to blaze up as brightly as possible!”

Three days later I took leave of Konováloff. I was going to the Kubán, he did not wish to go. But we both parted with the conviction that we should meet again on earth.

It has not come to pass. . . .



# **THE KHAN AND HIS SON**



## THE KHAN AND HIS SON

“ . . . In the Crimea there was a Khan Mosolaïma el Asvab, and he had a son, Tolaïk Alhalla . . . ”

With his back propped against the brilliant light-brown trunk of an arbutus-tree, a blind beggar, a Tatár, began, in these words, one of the ancient legends of the peninsula, which is rich in its memories, and round about the storyteller, on stone fragments of the palace of the khans, destroyed by time, sat a group of Tatárs in gay-colored kaftans and flat caps embroidered with gold. It was evening, and the sun was sinking softly into the sea; its red rays penetrated the dark mass of verdure around the ruins, and fell in brilliant spots upon the stones, overgrown with moss, enmeshed in the clinging greenery of the ivy. The breeze rustled in a clump of aged plane-trees, and their leaves fluttered as though brooks of water, invisible to the eye, were rippling through the air.

The voice of the blind beggar was weak, and trembled, but his stony face expressed in its wrinkles nothing except repose; the words he had learned by heart flowed on, one after the other, and before the hearers rose up a picture of past days, rich in the power of emotion.

“The Khan was old,” said the blind man, “but he had a great many women in his harem. And they loved the old man, because he still had a good deal of strength and fire, and his caresses soothed and burned, and women

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will always love those who know how to caress strongly, be the man a gray-beard, or even if he have wrinkles on his countenance—for there is beauty in strength, but not in a soft skin and a ruddy cheek.

“ They all loved the Khan, but he loved a kazák-prisoner maid, from the steppes of the Dnyépr, and always liked more to fondle her than the other women of his harem, his great harem, where there were three hundred women from divers lands, and they were all as beautiful as the flowers of spring, and they all lived well. Many were the sweet and dainty viands which the Khan ordered to be prepared for them, and he always permitted them to dance and play whenever they desired to do so . . .

“ But his kazák he often summoned to his own quarters in the tower, from which the sea was visible, and where he had everything for the kazák girl that a woman can want, that her life might be merry: sweet wine, and various fabrics, and gold, and precious stones of all colors, and music, and rare birds from distant countries, and the fiery caresses of the amorous Khan. In this tower he amused himself with her for whole days together, resting from the cares of his life, and knowing that his son Alhalla would not lower the glory of the Khan, as he galloped like a wolf over the Russian steppes, always returning thence with rich booty, with fresh women, with fresh glory, leaving there, behind him, terror and ashes, corpses and blood.

“ Once he, Alhalla, returned from a raid on the Russians, and many festivals were arranged in his honor; all the murzas of the island assembled at them, and there were banquets and games, and they fired arrows from their bows into the eyes of the prisoners, testing their strength of arm, and again they drank, lauding the valor of Alhalla, the terror of enemies, the mainstay of the Khanate. And the

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old Khan rejoiced exceedingly at the glory of his son.—It was good for him, that old man, to behold in his son such a dashing warrior, and to know that when he, the old man, came to die, the Khanate would be in stout hands.

“It was good for him to know that, and so, being desirous to show his son the strength of his love, he said to him, in the presence of all the murzas and beys there, at the feast, beaker in hand, he said:

“‘Thou art a good son, Alhalla! Glory be to Allah, and glorified be the name of his prophet!’

“And all glorified the name of the prophet in a chorus of mighty voices. Then the Khan said:

“‘Great is Allah! Already, during my lifetime, he has renewed my youth in my gallant son, and now, with my aged eyes, I perceive that when the sun shall be hidden from them,—and when the worms shall devour my breast,—I shall still live on in my son! Great is Allah, and Mahomet is his true prophet! I have a good son, his arm is strong, and his heart is bold, and his mind is clear. . . . What wilt thou take from the hand of thy father, Alhalla? Tell me, and I will give thee everything, according to thy desire.’

“And the sound of the old Khan’s voice had not yet died away when Tolaïk Alhalla rose to his feet, and said, with flashing eyes, black as the sea by night and blazing like the eyes of the mountain eagle:

“‘Give me the Russian prisoner, my sovereign father.’

“The Khan spake not—for a space he said no word, for so long as was required to crush the shudder in his heart,—and, after this pause, he said, boldly and firmly:

“‘Take her! Let us finish the feast, and then thou shalt take her.’

“Gallant Alhalla flushed all over, his eagle eyes flashed



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with the greatness of his joy; he rose to his full height, and said to his father-Khan:

“ ‘ I know what thou dost give me, sovereign father! I know . . . I am thy slave—thy son. Take my blood, a drop an hour—twenty deaths will I die for thee! ’

“ ‘ I require nothing! ’ said the Khan, and bowed his gray head, crowned with the glory of long years and many feats, upon his breast.

“ Speedily did they finish the feast, and the two went silently, side by side, from the palace to the harem.

“ The night was dark, and neither moon nor stars were visible for the clouds which covered the heaven like a thick carpet.

“ Long did the father and son walk through the darkness, and now the Khan el Asvab spake:

“ ‘ Day by day my life is dying out, and my old heart beats more and more feebly, and less and still ever less is there of fire in my breast. The fervent caresses of the kazák woman have been the light and warmth of my life. . . . Tell me, Tolaïk, tell me, is she so necessary to thee? Take a hundred, take all my wives, save only her! . . . ’

“ Tolaïk Alhalla made no reply, but sighed.

“ ‘ How many days are left to me? Few are my days on earth. . . . She is the last joy of my life,—that Russian girl. She knows me, she loves me,—who will love me now, when I no longer have her—me, an old man, who? Not one among them all, not one, Alhalla! ’

“ Alhalla said no word.

“ ‘ How shall I live, knowing that thou art embracing her, that she is kissing thee? To a woman, there is no such thing as father or son, Tolaïk! To a woman, we are all men, my son. . . . Painful will it be for me to live

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out my days. . . . Rather let all the ancient wounds on my body open again, Tolaïk, and let them shed my blood—rather let me not survive this night, my son!’

“His son remained silent. . . . They halted at the door of the harem, and silently, bowing their heads on their breasts, they stood long before it. Gloom was round about them, and clouds raced across the sky, while the wind shook the trees, as though it were singing some song to them.

“‘I have loved her long, father!’ said Alhalla softly.

“‘I know . . . and I know that she does not love thee,’ said the Khan.

“‘My heart is rent when I think of her.’

“‘And with what is my aged heart filled now?’

“And again they fell silent. Alhalla sighed.

“‘’Tis plain that the wise mullah told me the truth—a woman is always injurious to a man: when she is handsome, she arouses in others the desire to possess her, and she delivers her husband over to the pangs of jealousy; when she is ugly, her husband, envying others, suffers from envy; but if she is neither handsome nor ugly,—a man imagines her very handsome, and when he comes to understand that he has made a mistake, he suffers again through her, that woman.’

“‘Wisdom is not medicine for an aching heart . . .’ said the Khan.

“‘Let us have compassion on each other, father . . .’

“The Khan raised his head, and gazed sadly at his son.

“‘Let us kill her,’ said Tolaïk.

“‘Thou lovest thyself more than her and me,—’ said the Khan softly, after meditating for a space.

“‘Surely, it is the same with thee.’

“And again they fell silent.

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“ ‘ Yes! And I, also,’—said the Khan mournfully. He had become a child through grief.

“ ‘ Well, shall we kill her? ’

“ ‘ I cannot give her up to thee, I cannot,’ said the Khan.

“ ‘ And I cannot endure it any longer—tear out my heart, or give her to me . . . ’

“ The Khan made no reply.

“ ‘ Or let us fling her into the sea from the mountain.’

“ ‘ Let us fling her into the sea from the mountain,’ the Khan repeated his son’s words, like the echo of his son’s voice.

“ And then they entered the harem, where she already lay asleep upon the floor, on a rich rug. They paused in front of her and gazed; long did they gaze upon her. Tears trickled from the old Khan’s eyes upon his silvery beard and gleamed in it like pearls, but his son stood with flashing eyes, and gnashing his teeth, to restrain his passion. He aroused the kazák girl. She awoke, and on her face, tender and rosy as the dawn, her blue eyes blossomed like corn-flowers. She did not perceive Alhalla, and stretched out her scarlet lips to the Khan.

“ ‘ Kiss me, old eagle! ’

“ ‘ Make ready . . . thou must come with us,’—said the Khan softly.

“ Then she saw Alhalla, and the tears in the eyes of her eagle, and she understood all, for she was clever.

“ ‘ I come,’ she said,—‘ I come. I am to belong neither to the one nor to the other—is that what you have decided? That is how the strong of heart should decide. I come.’

“ And silently they all three went toward the sea. Through narrow ways they went, and the breeze rustled, rustled sonorously. . . .

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“She was tender, the girl, and wearied soon, but she was proud also—and would not tell them so.

“And when the Khan’s son observed that she did not keep pace with them, he said to her:

“‘Art thou afraid?’

“She gave him a flashing glance, and showed him her bleeding foot.

“‘Come, I will carry thee!’—said Alhalla, reaching out his arms to her. But she threw her arms around the neck of her old eagle. The Khan raised her in his arms, like a feather, and carried her; and she, as she sat in his arms, thrust aside the boughs of the trees from his face, fearing that they would strike his eyes. Long did they journey thus, and lo! the roar of the sea could be heard in the distance. Then Tolaïk—he walked behind them in the path—said to his father:

“‘Let me go on ahead, for I want to stab thee in the neck with my dagger.’

“‘Pass on—Allah will take vengeance on thee for thy desire, or forgive thee—as he wills,—but I, thy father, forgive thee. I know what it means to love.’

“And lo! the sea lay before them, yonder below, black and shoreless. Its waves chanted dully at the very base of the cliff, and it was dark and cold and terrible there below.

“‘Farewell!’ said the Khan, as he kissed the girl.

“‘Farewell!’ said Alhalla, and bowed low before her.

“She glanced out afar, where the waves were singing, and staggered back, pressing her hands to her breast . . .

“‘Throw me!’ she said to them.

“Alhalla stretched out his hands to her and groaned, but the Khan took her in his arms, pressed her close to his breast, kissed her, and raising her high over his head,—he flung her from the cliff.

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“There the waves were plashing and singing so noisily that neither of them heard when she reached the water. They heard no cry, nothing. The Khan sank down upon a stone, and began to gaze downward in silence into the darkness and distance, where the sea merged into the clouds, whence noisily floated the dull beating of the billows, whence flew the wind which fluttered the Khan’s gray beard. Tolaïk stood over him, covering his face with his hands, motionless and silent as a stone. Time passed, and athwart the sky the clouds floated past, one after another, driven by the wind. Dark and heavy were they, as the thoughts of the aged Khan, who lay on the lofty cliff above the sea.

“‘Let us go, father,’ said Tolaïk.

“‘Wait,’—whispered the Khan, as though listening to something.

“And again much time elapsed, and still the waves beat below, and the wind flew to the cliff, making a noise in the trees.

“‘Let us go, father.’

“‘Wait a little longer . . .’

“More than once did Tolaïk Alhalla say:

“‘Let us go, father.’

“But still the Khan stirred not from the place, where he had lost the joy of his last days.

“But—all things have an end!—he rose, strong and proud, rose, knitted his brows, and said in a dull tone:

“‘Let us go.’

“They went, but the Khan speedily halted.

“‘Why am I going and whither, Tolaïk?’—he asked his son.—‘Why should I live now, when all my life was in her? I am old, no one will love me more, and if no one loves thee—it is senseless to live in the world.’

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“ ‘Thou hast glory and riches, father . . .’

“ ‘Give me but one kiss of hers, and take all that to thyself as reward. All that is dead, the love of woman alone is alive. There is no such love, there is no life in a man, a beggar is he, and pitiful are his days. Farewell, my son, the blessing of Allah be on thy head, and remain there all the days and nights of thy life.’ And the Khan turned his face seaward.

“ ‘Father,’—said Tolaïk, ‘father! . . .’ He could say no more, for there is nothing that one can say to a man on whom death smiles, and nothing canst thou say to him which shall restore to his soul the love of life.

“ ‘Let me go . . .’

“ ‘Allah . . .’

“ ‘He knows . . .’

With swift strides the Khan approached the brink, and hurled himself down. His son did not hold him back, there was no time for that. And again nothing was audible from the sea—neither shriek nor noise of the Khan’s fall. Only the waves plashed on there, and the wind hummed wild songs.

“Long did Tolaïk Alhalla gaze below, and then he said aloud:

“ ‘And grant me, also, as stout a heart, oh Allah!’

“And then he went forth into the gloom of the night.

“ . . . Thus perished Khan Mosolaïma el Asvab, and Tolaïk Alhalla became Khan of the Crimea.”



# THE EXORCISM





## THE EXORCISM

Along the village street, between rows of white-plastered cottages, a strange procession is moving along, with wild howls.

A crowd of people is walking along, walking slowly, in dense ranks,—moving like a huge wave, and in front of it strides a miserable little horse, a comically woolly little nag, with head drooping low. As it lifts a fore foot, it shakes its head strangely, as though it wanted to thrust its woolly muzzle into the dust of the road, and when it moves a hind foot, its crupper settles down toward the earth, and it seems as though the horse were on the point of falling.

Bound to the front of the peasant cart, with a rope about her wrists, is a small, entirely nude woman, almost a girl in years. She walks rather strangely—sideways, her head, with its thick, dishevelled hair of a dark chestnut hue, is raised and thrown a little backward, her eyes are opened widely and are gazing off into the distance with a dull, unintelligent look, which has nothing human about it. Her whole body is covered with blue and dark-red spots, both circular and oblong; her left breast, elastic, maidenly, is cleft, and from it the blood is dripping. . . . It forms a crimson streak on her body, and down along the left leg to the knee, while on her lower leg it is concealed by a light-brown coating of dust. It seems as though a long, narrow strip of skin had been flayed from the woman's body, which must have undergone a prolonged beating with

## The Exorcism

a club,—it is monstrously swollen and horribly blue all over.

The woman's feet, small and well-shaped, hardly tread the dust; her whole body is terribly bent over, and sways from side to side, and it is impossible to understand how she can still stand on her legs, thickly covered, like her whole body, with bruises, why she does not fall to the ground, and, suspended by her arms, is not dragged after the cart along the hot, dusty road . . .

And in the cart stands a tall peasant in a white shirt, a black lambskin cap, from beneath which, intersecting his brow, hangs a lock of bright-red hair; in one hand he grasps the reins, in the other a whip, and methodically bestows one lash upon the back of the nag, and one upon the body of the little woman, already beaten until it has lost the semblance of a human being. The eyes of the red-headed man are suffused with blood, and gleam with evil triumph. His hair blends with their greenish hue. His shirt-sleeves, stripped up to the elbow, display strong, muscular arms, thickly overgrown with reddish hair; his mouth, filled with sharp, white teeth, is open, and from time to time the peasant shouts hoarsely:

“Gi-ive it to her . . . the wi-itch! Hey! Gi-ive it to her! Aha! Here goes! . . . Isn't that the thing, comrades? . . .”

And behind the cart and the woman bound to it, the crowd surges on in billows, shouting, howling, whistling, laughing, shouting the hunting cry . . . teasing . . . Wretched little boys are running alongside. Now and then one of them darts ahead, and shouts foul words in the woman's ear. Then a burst of laughter from the crowd drowns all other sounds, and the piercing whistle of the whiplash through the air. . . . Women are walk-

## The Exorcism

ing there, with excited faces, and eyes sparkling with satisfaction. . . . There are men, also, who shout something disgusting to the man in the cart. . . . He turns round toward them, and roars with laughter, opening his mouth very wide. A blow with the whip on the woman's back. . . . The long, thin whip curls round her shoulders, and now it lashes her under the armpit. Then the peasant who is flogging her draws the lash strongly toward him; the woman utters a shrill cry, and, throwing herself backward, falls on her back in the dust. Many of the crowd spring toward her, and hide her from sight with their bodies, as they bend over her.

The horse stops short, but, a moment later, moves on again, and the unmercifully beaten woman moves along with the cart as before. And the wretched nag, as it paces slowly onward, keeps shaking its woolly head, as though it wanted to say:

“See how vile a thing it is to be a beast! They can force you to take part in every sort of abominable thing!”

And the sky, the sky of the south, is perfectly clear,—there is not a single cloud, and from it the summer sun lavishly pours out its burning rays.

. . . . .

This, which I have written above, is not an allegorical description of the persecution and torture of a prophet, who has no honor in his own country,—no, unfortunately, it is not that! It is called an “exorcism.” Thus do husbands punish their wives for infidelity; this is a picture from life, a custom,—and I beheld it in the year 1891, on the 15th of July, in the village of Kandybóvko, Government of Khersón.



# **MEN WITH PASTS**



# MEN WITH PASTS

## I.

Vyézhaya (Entrance) Street consists of two rows of aged, one-story hovels, squeezed closely one against the other, with leaning walls and windows all awry; the hole-ridden roofs of these human habitations, thus crippled by time, are mottled with patches of the inner bark of the linden-tree, and overgrown with moss; above them, here and there, project tall poles surmounted by starling-houses, and they are shaded by the dusty verdure of elderberry bushes and crooked willows, the scanty flora of the town suburbs inhabited by poverty.

The window-panes of the tiny houses, of a turbid-green hue through age, stare at each other with the glances of cowardly sharpers. Up-hill, through the middle of the street, crawls a winding cart-track, which tacks back and forth among deep gullies, washed out by the rains. Here and there lie heaps of broken bricks and other rubbish, overgrown with high grass—representing the remnants or the beginnings of the constructions, unsuccessfully undertaken by the inhabitants in their fight with the floods of rain-water, which flow like torrents from the town. Up above, on the crest of the hill, handsome stone houses conceal themselves amid the luxuriant verdure of thick gardens, and the belfries of churches rise proudly into the blue sky, their golden crosses glitter dazzlingly in the sun.

During rains, the town sends its dirt down upon



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Vyézhaya Street; in dry weather, it sprinkles it with dust,—and all these deformed little houses look as though they, also, had been flung out of it, swept forth, like rubbish, by some mighty hand.

Flattened down against the earth, they were sprinkled all over the hill, half-decayed, infirm, decorated by sun, dust, and rain with that dirty grayish hue which defies description that wood acquires with age.

At the extremity of this wretched street, flung out of the town to the bottom of the hill, stood a long, two-story deserted house, which had escheated to the town, and had been purchased from the town by merchant Petúnnikoff. It was the last in the line, standing at the very foot of the hill, and beyond it extended a wide plain, intersected, half a verst from the house, by a steep declivity descending to the river.

This large and very aged house possessed the most gloomy aspect of all among its neighbors. It was all askew, in its two rows of windows there was not a single one which had preserved its regular shape, and the splinters of glass in the shattered frames had the turbidly-greenish hue of swamp water.

The walls between the windows were streaked with cracks and dark spots of peeling stucco—as though time had written its biography on the walls of the house in these hieroglyphs. The roof, which sloped toward the street, still further increased its rueful aspect—it seemed as though the house had bent down to the ground, and was submissively awaiting from Fate the final blow which should convert it into dust, into a shapeless heap of half-rotten fragments.

The gate stood open—one half of it, torn from its hinges, lay on the ground, and through the crevices be-

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tween its planks had sprouted the grass, which thickly covered the desert courtyard of the house. At the far end of this courtyard stood a low, smoke-begrimed building with an iron roof, of one slant. The house itself was, of course, uninhabitable, but in this building, which had formerly been the blacksmith's shop, there was now installed a "night lodging-house," kept by Aristíd Fómitch Kuválda,\* retired captain of cavalry.

The interior of the night lodging-house presented a long, gloomy burrow, four fathoms by ten; it was lighted on one side by four small, square windows, and a broad door. Its unplastered brick walls were black with soot, the ceiling, of barge-bottom wood,† was also smoked until it was black; in the middle of the place stood a huge stove, for which the forge served as foundation, and around the stove, and along the walls, ran wide sleeping-shelves with heaps of all sorts of stuff, which served the lodgers as beds. The wall reeked with smoke, the earthen floor reeked with dampness, from the sleeping-shelves proceeded an odor of sweaty and decaying rags.

The quarters of the lodging-house's proprietor were on the stove; the sleeping-shelves around the stove were the places of honor, and upon them the night-lodgers who enjoyed the favor and friendship of the proprietor disposed themselves.

The cavalry captain always spent the day at the door of the night lodging-house, seated in something after the likeness of an arm-chair, which he had put together, with his

\* *Kuválda* means a *mallet*; or, figuratively, a *clown*.—*Translator*.

† The barges for transporting wood, and so forth, on Russian rivers, are put together with huge wooden pegs. After being unloaded, at their destination, they are broken up, and the hole-riddled planks are sold at a very low price.—*Translator*.

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own hands, out of bricks; or in the eating-house of Egór Vavíloff, which was situated slantwise opposite the Petún-nikoff house; there the captain dined and drank vódka.

Before he hired these quarters, Aristíd Kuválða had had an employment office for servants in the town; if we were to penetrate further back in his past, we should discover that he had had a printing-office, and before the printing-office he had—to use his own language—“simply lived. And I lived magnificently, devil take it! I may say, that I lived like a man who knows how!”

He was a broad-shouldered, tall man, fifty years of age, with a pock-marked face which was bloated with intoxication, framed in a broad, dirty-yellow beard. His eyes were gray, huge, audaciously jolly; he spoke in a bass voice, with a rumbling in his throat, and from his lips a German porcelain pipe, with a curved stem, almost always projected. When he was angry, the nostrils of his huge, hooked, bright-red nose became widely inflated, and his lips quivered, revealing two rows of yellow teeth, as large as those of a wolf. Long-armed, knock-kneed, always clad in a dirty and tattered officer's cloak, a greasy cap with a red band but without a visor, and in wretched felt boots, which reached to his knees—he was always in a depressed state of drunken headache in the morning, while in the evening he was jolly drunk. Drink as he would, he could not get dead drunk, and he never lost his merry mood.

In the evenings, as he sat in his brick arm-chair, with his pipe in his teeth, he received lodgers.

“Who are you?”—he inquired of the man who approached him, a tattered, downtrodden individual who had been ejected from the town for drunkenness, or who, for some other, no less solid reason, had gone down hill.

The man replied.

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“Present the legal document, in confirmation of your lies.”

The document was presented, if there was one.\* The captain thrust it into his breast, rarely interesting himself in its contents, and said:

“Everything is in order. Two kopéks a night, ten kopéks a week, by the month—thirty kopéks. Go and occupy a place, but look out that it doesn’t belong to somebody else, or you’ll get thrashed. The people who live in my house are stern. . . .”

Novices asked him:

“And you don’t deal in bread, tea or anything eatable?”

“I deal only in a wall and a roof, and for that I pay my rascally landlord, Judas † Petúnnikoff, merchant of the second Guild, five rubles a month,”—explained Kuválda, in a business-like tone; “the people who come to me are not used to luxury . . . and if you are accustomed to gobble every day,—there’s the eating-house opposite. But it would be better if you, you wreck, would break yourself of that bad habit. You’re not a nobleman, you know,—so why should you eat? Eat yourself!”

For these and similar speeches, uttered in a tone of mock severity, and always with laughing eyes, and for his courteous behavior to his lodgers, the captain enjoyed wide popularity among the poor people of the town. It often happened that a former patron of the captain presented himself to him in the courtyard, no longer tattered and oppressed, but in a more or less decent guise, and with a brisk countenance.

\* “Document” or (literally) “paper,” here, as often, means the passport.—*Translator*.

† As the reader will perceive, later on, Petúnnikoff’s name was not *Juda* (Judas). This is Kuválda’s sarcasm.—*Translator*.

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"Good-day, your Well-Born! How's your health?"

"I'm well. I'm alive. ~~Speak~~ further."

"Don't you recognize me?"

"No."

"But you remember, I lived about a month with you in the winter . . . when that police round-up took place, and they gathered in three men!"

"We-ell now, brother, the police are constantly visiting my hospitable roof!"

"Akh, oh Lord! It was the time when you made that insulting gesture at the police-captain!"

"Wait, spit on all memories, and say simply, what do you want?"

"Won't you accept a little treat from me? When I lived with you that time, you treated me, so. . . ."

"Gratitude ought to be encouraged, my friend, for it is rarely met with among men. You must be a fine young fellow, and although I don't remember you in the least, I'll accompany you to the dram-shop with pleasure, and drink to your success in life with delight."

"And you're just the same as ever . . . always joking?"

"But what else could I do, living among you unfortunates?"

They went. Sometimes the captain's former patron returned to the lodging-house completely unscrewed and shaken loose by the treat; on the following day, they both treated each other again, and one fine morning, the former patron awoke with the consciousness that he had once more drunk up his last penny.

"Your Well-Born! A misfortune has befallen me! I've got into your squad again. What am I to do now?"

"A situation on which you are not to be congratulated,

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but, since you are in it, it's not proper to be stingy,"—argued the captain.—“You must bear yourself with indifference toward everything, not spoiling your life with philosophy, and not putting questions. It is always stupid to philosophize, and to philosophize when one has a drunken headache—is inexpressibly stupid. A drunken headache demands vódka, and not gnawings of conscience and gnashing of teeth . . . spare your teeth, or there won't be anything to beat you on. Here now, are twenty kopéks for you,—go and bring a measure of vódka, five kopék's worth of hot tripe or lights, a pound of bread, and two cucumbers. When we get rid of our headache, we'll consider the situation of affairs.”

The situation of affairs was defined with entire clearness, a couple of days later, when the captain had not a kopék left out of the three-ruble or five-ruble bank-note which he had had in his pocket on the day when his grateful patron had made his appearance.

“We've arrived! Enough!”—said the cavalry captain. “Now that you and I, you fool, have ruined ourselves with drink, let us try to enter again upon the path of sobriety and virtue. How just is the saying: If you don't sin, you don't repent, and if you don't repent, you won't be saved. We have performed the first, but repentance is useless, so let's save ourselves at once. Take yourself off to the river and work. If you can't trust yourself, tell the contractor to retain your money, or give it to me. When we have amassed a capital, I'll buy you some trousers and the other things that are necessary to enable you to appear again as a respectable and quiet toiler, persecuted by fate. In new trousers you can go a long way! March!”

The patron took himself off to act as porter at the river-side, laughing at the captain's long and wise speeches. He

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only dimly understood their poignant wit, but he beheld before him the merry eyes, felt the courageous spirit, and knew, that in the eloquent cavalry-captain he had a hand which could uphold him in case of need.

And, as a matter of fact, after a month or two of hard labor the patron, thanks to stern supervision of his conduct on the part of the captain, was in possession of the material possibility of rising again a step higher than the place to which he had descended through the benevolent sympathy of that same captain.

"We-ell, my friend," said Kuválda, as he took a critical survey of his restored patron,—“you have trousers and a pea-jacket. These articles are of vast importance—trust my experience. As long as I had decent trousers, I lived in the town, in the character of a respectable man, but, devil take it, as soon as my trousers dropped off, I fell in people's estimation, and was obliged to drop down here myself, from the town. People, my very fine blockhead, judge of everything by its form, but the essence of things is inaccessible to them, because of men's inborn stupidity. Carve that on your nose, and when you have paid me even one half of your debt, go in peace, and seek, and thou shalt find!”

“How much do I owe you, Aristíd Fómitch?” inquired the patron in confusion.

“One ruble and seventy kopéks . . . Now give me a ruble or seventy kopéks, and I'll wait for the rest until you have stolen or earned more than you have now.”

“Thank you most sincerely for your kindness!” said the patron, much affected. “What a good sort of fellow you are, really! Ekh, life did wrong in treating you hardly. . . . I think you must have been a regular eagle in your own place?!”

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The captain could not exist without speeches of declamatory eloquence.

“What signifies ‘in my own place?’ No one knows his own place in life, and everyone of us gets his head into someone else’s harness. The place for merchant Judas Petúnnikoff is among the hard-labor exiles, but he walks about in broad day through the streets, and even wants to build some sort of a factory. The place for our teacher is by the side of a good wife, and in the midst of half a dozen children, but he is lying around at Vavíloff’s, in the dram-shop. And here are you—you’re going off to seek a place as a footman or a corridor-waiter,\* but I see that your place is among the soldiers, for you are stupid, you have endurance, and you understand discipline. You see what sort of affair it is? Life shuffles us like cards, and only accidentally—and that not for long—do we fall into our own places!”

Sometimes such conversations at parting served as prefaces to a continuation of the acquaintance, which again began with a good drinking-bout, and again reached the point where the patron had drunk up his all, and was amazed; the captain gave him his revenge, and . . . both drank up their last penny.

Such repetitions of what had gone before, did not, in the least, interfere with the kindly relations between the parties. The teacher mentioned by the captain was precisely one of those patrons who had reformed only to ruin himself again immediately. By his intellect, he was a man

\* This “corridor-waiter” in Russian hotels, prepares the samovár, or makes coffee, in a small, up-stairs buffet, near the bedrooms of his allotted section, and serves, with bread, butter and cream, or whatever is ordered. It is also his duty to bring up all other meals which are served in private rooms.—*Translator.*



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who stood closer to the captain than all the rest, and, possibly, it was precisely to this cause that he was indebted for the fact that, after having descended to the night-lodging-house, he could no longer raise himself.

With him alone could Aristíd Kuválda philosophize with the certainty of being understood. He prized this, and when the reformed teacher prepared to leave the lodging-house, after having earned a little money, and with the intention of hiring a nook for himself in the town,—Aristíd Kuválda escorted him with so much sorrow, spouted so many melancholy tirades, that they both infallibly set out on a spree, and drank up all they owned. In all probability, Kuválda deliberately arranged the matter so that the teacher, despite all his desires, could not get away from his lodging-house. Was it possible for Aristíd Kuválda, a member of the gentry, with education, the remnants of which even now glittered in his speech, from time to time, with a habit of thinking developed by the vicissitudes of fate,—was it possible for him not to desire and to try to behold always by his side a man of the same sort as himself? We know how to have compassion on ourselves.

This teacher had once taught some branch in the Teachers' Institute of some town on the Vólga, but, in consequence of several scrapes, had been discharged from the institute. Then he had been a counting-house clerk at a tanning factory, and had been obliged to quit that also. He had been a librarian in some private library, he had tried a few more professions, and, finally, after passing an examination as attorney-at-law, he took to drinking like a fish, and hit upon the cavalry captain. He was tall, round-shouldered, with a long, sharp nose, and a perfectly bald head. In his bony, yellow face, with its small, pointed

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beard, shone large, restlessly-melancholy eyes, deeply sunk in their orbits, and the corners of his mouth drooped dolefully downward. He earned his means of livelihood, or rather of drink, by acting as reporter to the local newspapers. It did happen that he earned as much as fifteen rubles a week. Then he gave the money to the captain, and said:

“Enough! I’m going to return to the lap of culture. One week more of work,—and I shall dress myself decently, and *addio, mio caro!*”

“Very laudable! . . . As I, from my soul, sympathize with your resolution, Philip, I shall not give you a single glass during that entire week,”—the captain gave him friendly warning.

“I shall be grateful!—You won’t give even a single drop?”

The captain detected in his words something approaching a timid entreaty for relaxation, and said, still more sternly:

“Even if you roar for it—I won’t give it!”

“Well, that settles it”—sighed the teacher, and set off about his reporting. A day later, or, at most, two days, defeated, weary and thirsty he was staring at the captain from some nook, with mournful, beseeching eyes, and waiting in trepidation, for the heart of his friend to soften. The captain assumed a surly aspect, and uttered speeches impregnated with deadly irony, on the theme of the disgrace of having a weak character, about the beastly delight of drunkenness, and on all other themes appropriate to the occasion. To do him justice—he was sincerely carried away with his rôle as mentor and moralist; but his steady customers at the night-lodging-house, being of a sceptical cast of mind, said one to another, winking in the

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direction of the captain, as they watched him and listened to his croaking speeches:

“The sly dog! He puts him off cleverly! ‘I told you so,’ says he, ‘and you wouldn’t listen to me—now you may thank yourself!’”

But the teacher caught his friend somewhere in a dark corner, and tightly clutching his dirty cloak, trembling all over, licking his dry lips, he gazed in his face with a deeply-tragic glance inexpressible in words.

“You can’t?”—inquired the captain morosely.

The teacher nodded, in silent assent, and then dropped his head dejectedly on his breast, trembling all over his long, gaunt body.

“Hold out one day more . . . perhaps you’ll reform?” suggested Kuválda.

The teacher sighed, and shook his head negatively, hopelessly. The captain saw that his friend’s gaunt body was all quivering with thirst for the poison, and pulled the money out of his pocket.

“In the majority of cases, it is useless to contend with destiny,”—he remarked as he did so, as though desirous of justifying himself to someone.

But if the teacher did hold out the entire week, a touching scene of the farewell of friends was enacted between him and the captain, and its final act usually took place in Vavíloff’s eating-house.

The teacher did not drink up the whole of his money: he spent at least half of it on the children in Vyézhaya Street. Poor people are always rich in children, and in this street, in its dust and holes, swarms of dirty, tattered and half-starved little brats moved restlessly and noisily about, all day long, from morning till night.

Children are the living flowers of earth, but in Vyézhaya

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Street they had the appearance of flowers which had withered prematurely; it must have been because they grew on soil which was poor in healthy juices.

So the teacher often collected them about him, and having purchased rolls, eggs, apples and nuts, he walked with them into the fields, to the river. There they disposed themselves on the ground, and, first of all, hungrily devoured everything the teacher offered them, and then began to play, filling the air for a whole verst \* round about with their careless noise and laughter. The long, gaunt figure of the drunkard somehow shrunk together in the midst of these little folks, who treated him with entire familiarity, as one of their own age. They even addressed him simply as Philip, without adding to his name "uncle" or "little uncle." As they flitted swiftly around him, they jostled him, sprang upon his back, slapped him on his bald head, seized him by the nose. All this must have delighted him, for he did not protest against such liberties. On the whole, he talked very little with them, and if he did speak, he did it as cautiously and even timidly as though his words might spot them, or, in general, do them harm. He passed several hours at a time, in the rôle of their plaything and comrade, surveying their animated little faces with his mournfully-sad eyes, and then, thoughtfully and slowly, he went away from them to Vaviloff's tavern, and there, quickly and silently, he drank himself into a state of unconsciousness.

Almost every day, on his return from his reportorial work, the teacher brought with him a newspaper, and a general assembly of all the men with pasts formed around him. On catching sight of him, they moved toward him

\* A verst is two-thirds of a mile.—*Translator.*

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from the various nooks of the courtyard, in an intoxicated condition, or suffering from drunken headaches, diversely dishevelled, but all equally wretched and dirty.

Alexéi Maxímovitch Símtzoff came: he was as fat as a cask, had been a forester in the service of the Crown Estates, but was now a peddler of matches, ink, blacking, and refuse lemons. He was an old man of fifty, clad in a sail-cloth great-coat, and a broad-brimmed hat, which sheltered his fat, red face, with its thick, white beard, from amid which his tiny, crimson nose and his thick lips of the same color, and his tearful, cynical little eyes peered forth upon God's world. They called him "The Peg-top"; and this nickname accurately described his round figure, and his speech, which resembled the humming of a top.

From somewhere in a corner, "The End" crawled forth, —a gloomy, taciturn and desperate drunkard, formerly prison-superintendent Luká Antónovitch Martyánoff, a man who subsisted by gambling at "Little Belt," at "Three Little Leaves," at "Little Bank," and by other arts, equally witty, and equally disliked by the police. He lowered his heavy body, which had been more than once soundly beaten, heavily upon the grass, alongside the teacher, flashed his black eyes, and stretching out his hand for the bottle, inquired in a hoarse bass voice:

"May I?"

Mechanician Pável Sólntzeff made his appearance, a consumptive man, thirty years of age. His left side had been smashed in a fight, and his yellow, sharp face, like that of a fox, was constantly contorted by a venomous smile. His thin lips disclosed two rows of yellow teeth, which had been ruined by illness, and the rags on his narrow, bony shoulders fluttered as though from a clothes-rack. His nickname was "The Gnawed Bone." His business con-

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sisted in peddling linden-bast brushes, of his own manufacture, and switches made of a certain sort of grass, which were very convenient for cleaning clothes.

There came, also, a tall, bony man, of unknown extraction, with a frightened expression in his large, round eyes, the left of which squinted,—a taciturn, timid fellow, who had thrice been incarcerated for theft, on the sentence of the judge of the peace, and the district judge. His surname was Kisélnikoff, but he was called Tarás-and-a-Half, because he was exactly one half taller than his inseparable friend, Deacon Tarás, who had been unfrocked for drunkenness and depraved conduct. The deacon was a short, thick man, with the chest of an epic hero, and a round, shaggy head. He danced wonderfully well, and was even more wonderful in his use of ribald language. He, in company with Tarás-and-a-Half, had selected for his specialty wood-sawing on the bank of the river, and in his leisure hours the deacon was wont to narrate to his friend, and to anyone who cared to listen, tales “of his own composition,” as he announced. As they listened to these tales, the heroes of which were always saints, kings, priests, and generals, even the inhabitants of the night lodging-house spat with squeamishness, and opened their eyes to their full extent in amazement at the fantasies of the deacon, who narrated, with his eyes screwed up, and with a dispassionate countenance, astonishingly shameless things, and foully-fantastic adventures. The imagination of this man was inexhaustible,—he could invent and talk all day long, from morning till night, and never repeated himself. In his person a great poet may have perished, possibly, or, at any rate, a remarkable story-teller, who knew how to animate everything, and even invested the stones with a soul by his vile but picturesque and powerful words.

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There was also an awkward sort of youth, whom Kuválda called The Meteor. One day he had made his appearance to spend the night, and from that day forth he had remained among these men, to their astonishment. At first they did not notice him,—by day, like the rest of them, he went off to seek his livelihood, but in the evening he clung about this amicable company, and at last the captain noticed him.

“Little boy! What are you doing in this land?”

The little boy answered boldly and briefly:

“I’m . . . a tramp . . .”

The captain eyed him over critically. He was a long-haired young fellow, with a rather foolish face, with high cheek-bones, adorned with a snub nose. He wore a blue blouse without a belt, and on his head was stuck the remains of a straw hat. His feet were bare.

“You’re—a fool!” Aristíd Kuválda pronounced his decision.—“What are you knocking about here for? You’re of no use to us. . . . Do you drink vódka? No . . . Well, and do you know how to steal? No, again. Go and learn, and then come back when you have become a man . . .”

The young fellow laughed.

“No, I think I’ll go on living with you.”

“What for?”

“Oh, because . . .”

“Akh, you . . . Meteor!” said the captain.

“Come, now, I’ll knock his teeth out for him, in a minute,” suggested Martyánoff.

“And what for?” inquired the captain.

“Nothing . . .”

“And I’ll take a stone and smash you over the head,”—announced the young fellow deferentially.

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Martyánoff would have given him a drubbing, had not Kuválda intervened.

"Let him alone. . . . He's a sort of relation to you, and to all of us, I think. You want to knock his teeth out without sufficient foundation; he, like yourself, wants to live with us, without sufficient foundation. Well, and devil take him. . . . We all live without sufficient foundation for it. . . . We live, but what for? Because! And he, also, because . . . let him alone."

"But you'd better go away from us, young man," advised the teacher, surveying the young fellow with his mournful eyes.

The latter made no reply, and remained. Later on, they got used to him, and ceased to notice him. But he lived among them, and observed everything.

All the individuals enumerated above constituted the captain's General Staff, and he, with good-humored irony, called them "the have-beens." In addition to them, five or six men constantly inhabited the night lodging-house—ordinary tramps. They were men from the country, they could not boast of any such pasts as "the have-beens," and although they, no less than the rest, had experienced the vicissitudes of fate, yet they were more unadulterated folks than those, not so horribly shattered. It is possible that a respectable man of the cultured class is higher than the same sort of man of the peasant class, but the depraved man from a town is always immeasurably more foul and disgusting than a depraved man from the country. This rule was made sharply apparent by comparing the former educated men with the former peasants who inhabited Kuválda's refuge.

An old rag-gatherer, Tyápa by name, was a conspicuous



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representative of the former peasants. Long, and thin to deformity, he held his head in such a manner that his chin rested on his chest, so that his shadow reminded one, by its shape, of an oven-fork. From the front, his face was not visible, in profile, nothing was to be seen except an aquiline nose, a pendulous lower lip, and shaggy, gray eyebrows. He was the captain's first lodger, in point of time, and they said of him that he had a lot of money concealed somewhere. Precisely on account of this money they had "scraped" his throat with a knife two years before, and from that day forth he had hung his head in that strange manner. He denied the existence of the money, he said that "they had scratched him simply for nothing, out of impudence," and that since then he had found it very convenient to gather rags and bones—his head was constantly bent earthward. As he walked along, with a swaying, uncertain gait, without a stick in his hand or a sack on his back—the insignia of his profession—he looked like a man who was meditative to the point of losing consciousness, but Kuválda was wont to say, at such moments, pointing his finger at him:

"See there, it's the conscience of merchant Judas Petúnnikoff, which has run away from him, and is seeking a refuge for itself! See how frayed, and vile, and filthy that runaway conscience is!"

Tyápa spoke in a harsh voice, which hardly permitted one to understand his remarks, and it must have been for that reason that he rarely talked, and was very fond of solitude. But every time that some fresh example of a man, who had been forced out of the country by poverty, made his appearance in the night lodging-house, Tyápa, at the sight of him, fell into melancholy ire and uneasiness. He persecuted the unfortunate man with caustic jeers,

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which emerged from his throat in a vicious rattle; he set some malicious tramp on him, and, in conclusion, he threatened to thrash him with his own hands, and rob him by night, and he almost always managed to make the frightened and disconcerted peasant disappear from the lodging-house and never appear there again.

Then Tyápa calmed down, and tucked himself away in a corner, where he mended his rags, or read a Bible, which was as old, dirty, and tattered as himself. He crawled out of his nook again when the teacher brought the newspaper and read it aloud. Generally, Tyápa listened to all that was read in silence, and sighed deeply, asking no questions about anything. But when the teacher folded up the paper, after he had finished reading it, Tyápa extended his bony hand, and said:

“Give it to me . . .”

“What do you want with it?”

“Give it . . . perhaps there’s something about us in it . . .”

“About whom?”

“About the village . . .”

They laughed at him, and flung the paper at him. He took it, and read that in such and such a village the grain had been beaten down by hail, and in another thirty houses had been burned, and in a third a woman had poisoned her family—everything which it is customary to write about the country, and which depicts it as merely unfortunate, silly, and evil. Tyápa read all this in a dull tone, and bellowed, expressing by this sound, possibly compassion, possibly satisfaction.

He spent the greater part of Sunday, on which day he never went out to gather rags, in reading his Bible. As he read, he bellowed and sighed. He held the book sup-

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ported on his chest, and was angry when anyone touched it, or interfered with his reading.

“Hey, there, you necromancer,”—Kuválda said to him, —“what do you understand? Drop it!”

“And what do you understand?”

“Just so, you sorcerer! Neither do I understand anything; but then, I don’t read books . . . .”

“But I do read them . . . .”

“Well, and you’re stupid,” . . . —declared the captain.—“When insects breed in the head, it’s uncomfortable, but if thoughts crawl in it also,—how will you live, you old toad?”

“Well, my time isn’t very long,”—said Tyápa calmly.

One day the teacher tried to find out where he had learned to read and write. Tyápa answered him curtly:

“In jail.”

“Have you been there?”

“Yes . . . .”

“What for?”

“Nothing. . . . I made a mistake. . . . And I brought this Bible from there. A lady gave it to me. . . . The jail is a nice place, brother . . . .”

“You don’t say so? How’s that?”

“It teaches you. . . . You see, I learned to read and write there. . . . I got a book. . . . Everything . . . is gratis. . . .”

When the teacher made his appearance in the lodging-house, Tyápa had already been living in it a long time. He stared long at the teacher,—in order to look in a man’s face Tyápa bent his whole body to one side,—listened long to his remarks, and one day he sat down beside him.

“Now, you’re one of those . . . you’ve been learned. . . . Have you read the Bible?”

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"Yes . . . ."

"Exactly so. . . . Do you remember it?"

"Well . . . . yes . . . ."

The old man bent his body on one side, and gazed at the teacher with his gray, sullen, distrustful eyes.

"And do you remember whether there were Amalekites there?"

"Well?"

"Where are they now?"

"They have disappeared, Tyápa . . . died out . . ."

The old man said nothing for a while, then asked another question:

"And the Philistines?"

"It's the same with them."

"Have they all died off?"

"Yes . . . . all . . . ."

"Exactly. . . . And we shall all die off?"

"The time will come when we, also, shall die off,"—the teacher predicted with indifference.

"And from which of the tribes of Israel do we come?"

The teacher looked at him, reflected, and then began to tell him about the Cimmerians, the Scythians, the Huns, the Slavs. . . . The old man curved himself still more on one side, and stared at him with terrified eyes.

"You're inventing all that!"—he said hoarsely, when the teacher had finished.

"Why am I inventing?"—asked the other, in surprise.

"What did you tell me the names of those people were? They're not in the Bible."

He rose and went away, deeply offended, and muttering angrily.

"You've outlived your mind, Tyápa," the teacher called after him, with conviction.

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Then the old man turned again toward him, and stretching out his arm, he menaced him with his hooked and dirty finger:

"Adam came from the Lord, and the Hebrews descended from Adam, which signifies that all men are descended from the Hebrews. . . . And we, also . . ."

"Well?"

"The Tatárs came from Ishmael . . . and he came from a Hebrew . . ."

"Yes, but what do you want?"

"Nothing! Why did you lie?"

And he went away, leaving his interlocutor dumfounded. But a couple of days later he again sat down beside him.

"You've had education . . . well, and you ought to know—who are we?"

"Slavonians, Tyápa,"—replied the teacher, and began attentively to await Tyápa's words, being desirous of understanding him.

"Speak according to the Bible—there are no such folks there. Who are we—Babylonians? Or from Edom?"

The teacher launched out upon a criticism of the Bible. The old man listened to him long and attentively, and interrupted:

"Hold on . . . stop that! You mean to say, that among the people known to God, there aren't any Russians? Are we people who aren't known to God? Is that it? Those who are inscribed in the Bible—those the Lord knew. . . . He annihilated them with fire and sword, he destroyed their towns and villages, but he also sent the prophets to them, for their instruction . . . that is to say, he had pity on them. He dispersed the Hebrews and the Tatárs, but he preserved them. . . . But how about us? Why haven't we any prophets?"

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"I—I don't know!"—said the teacher slowly, trying to understand the old man. But the latter laid his hand on the teacher's shoulder, began to push him gently to and fro, and said hoarsely, as though he were endeavoring to swallow something:

"Tell me, now! . . . You talk a great deal, as though you knew everything. It disgusts me to listen to you . . . you muddle my soul. . . . You'd better have held your tongue! . . . Who are we? Exactly! Why haven't we any prophets? Aha!—And where were we when Christ walked the earth? You see! Ekh, you stupid! And you keep on lying . . . could a whole nation die out? The Russian people can't disappear—you're lying . . . it's written down in the Bible, only it isn't known under what word. . . . You know the nation, what it's like? It's huge. . . . How many villages are there on the earth? The whole nation lives there . . . a genuine, great nation. . . . And you say—it will die out. . . . A nation can't die out, a man may . . . but a nation is necessary to God, he is the creator of the earth. The Amalekites didn't die—they're the Germans or the French . . . but you . . . ekh, you liar! . . . Come, now, tell me why God has passed us over? Haven't we any treasure or prophets from the Lord? Who teaches us? . . ."

Tyápa's speech was strangely forceful; ridicule, and reproach, and profound faith resounded in it. He talked for a long time, and the teacher, who was, as usual, the worse for liquor, and in a peaceable mood, finally felt as uncomfortable in listening to him as though he were being sawed in twain with a wooden saw. He listened to the old man, watched his distorted countenance, felt this strange, crushing power of words, and, all of a sudden, he

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felt sorry to the verge of pain, for himself, and sad over something. He, also, felt a desire to say something powerful, something confident, to the old man, something which would interest Tyápa in his favor, would make him talk not in that reproachfully-surly tone, but in a different,—a soft, paternally-affectionate one. And the teacher felt something gurgling in his breast, rising in his throat . . . but he could find in himself no powerful words.

“What sort of a man are you? . . . your soul is torn to rags . . . and you have said various words. . . . As though you knew. . . . You’d better have held your tongue. . . .”

“Ekh, Tyápa,”—exclaimed the teacher sadly,—“what you say is true. . . . And it’s true . . . about the nation! . . . It’s huge . . . but I am a stranger to it . . . and it’s strange to me. . . . That’s where the tragedy of my life lies . . . But—let me go! I shall suffer. . . . And there are no prophets . . . none! . . . I really do talk a great deal . . . and that’s of no use to anybody . . . But I will hold my tongue . . . only, don’t talk to me like that. . . . Ekh, old man! you don’t know . . . you don’t know . . . you can’t understand . . .”

The teacher began to weep at last. He wept so easily and freely, with such an abundance of tears, that he felt terribly pleased at the tears.

“You ought to go into a village . . . you might ask for the place of teacher or scribe there . . . and you’d get enough to eat, and you’d get aired. Why do you tarry?”—croaked Tyápa surlily.

But the teacher continued to weep, enjoying his tears.

From that time forth they became friends, and when the Men with Pasts saw them together they said:

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"The teacher's running after Tyápa . . . he's steering his course to the money."

"Kuválda put him up to that. . . . 'Find out,' says he, 'where the old fellow's capital is . . .'"

It is possible that, when they talked thus, they thought otherwise. There was one absurd characteristic about these men: they were fond of displaying themselves, one to another, as worse than they were in reality.

A man who has nothing good in him sometimes is not averse to strutting in his bad qualities.

When all these men had assembled around the teacher with his newspaper, the reading began.

"Well, sir," said the captain, "what does that nasty little newspaper discuss to-day? Is there a feuilleton?"

"No," answered the teacher.

"Your publisher is getting grasping. . . . And is there a leading article?"

"Yes, there is one to-day . . . Gulyáeff's, apparently."

"Aha! Let's have it; that rascal writes sensibly; he has an eye as sharp as a nail."

"Assessment of real estate," reads the teacher.

"The appraisal of real estate,"—reads the teacher,—  
"which was made more than fifteen years ago, and continues to serve at the present time as the basis for the collection of an assessment, for the benefit of the town . . ."

"That's ingenious,"—comments Captain Kuválda;—  
" 'continues to serve'! That's ridiculous. It's profitable for the merchant who runs the town to have it continue to serve; well, and so it does continue to serve . . ."

"The article is written on that theme,"—says the teacher.



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"Yes? Strange! That's the theme for a feuilleton . . . it must be written about in a peppery way."

A small dispute blazes up. The audience listens attentively to him, for only one bottle of vódka has been drunk thus far. After the leading article, the city items and the court record are read. If a merchant appears in these criminal sections either as an active or a suffering personality—Aristíd Kuválda sincerely exults. If the merchant has been plundered—very fine, only, it's a pity that he was robbed of so little. If his horses have smashed him up,—it's delightful news, only it's a great shame that he is still alive. If a merchant has lost his suit in court,—magnificent, but it's sad that the court costs were not imposed upon him in double measure.

"That would have been illegal,"—remarks the teacher.

"Illegal? But is the merchant himself legal?"—inquires Kuválda bitterly.—"What's a merchant? Let us examine that coarse and awkward phenomenon: first of all, every merchant is a peasant. He makes his appearance from the village, and, after the lapse of a certain time, he becomes a merchant. In order to become a merchant, he must have money. Where can the peasant get money? It is well known that money is not the reward of the labors of the upright. Hence, the peasant has played the scoundrel, in one way or another. Hence, a merchant is a scoundrelly-peasant!"

"That's clever!"—the audience expresses its approval of the orator's deduction.

But Tyápa roars, as he rubs his chest. He roars in exactly the same way when he drinks his first glass of vódka to cure his drunken headache. The captain is radiant. The letters from correspondents are read. These contain, for the captain, "an overflowing sea," to use his own

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words. Everywhere he sees how evil a thing the merchant is making of life, and how cleverly he crushes and spoils it. His speeches thunder out, and annihilate the merchant. They listen to him with satisfaction in their eyes, because he swears viciously.

"If only I wrote for the newspapers!"—he exclaims.—  
"Oh, I'd show up the merchant in his true light . . . I'd demonstrate that he's only an animal, temporarily discharging the functions of a man. I understand him! He? He's rough, he's stupid, he has no taste in life, he has no idea of the fatherland, and knows nothing more elevated than a five-kopék coin."

The Gnawed Bone, who knew the captain's weak side, and was fond of exasperating people, put in venomously:

"Yes, ever since the time when noblemen began unanimously to die of starvation—real men are disappearing from life . . ."

"You're right, you son of a spider and a toad; yes, ever since the nobles fell, there are no people! There are only merchants . . . and I ha-a-ate them!"

"That's easily understood, because you, brother, also have been trodden into dust by them . . ."

"I? I was ruined through my love of life . . . you fool! I loved life . . . but the merchant plunders it. I can't endure him, for precisely that reason . . . and not because I'm a nobleman. I'm not a nobleman, if you want to know it, but simply a man who has seen better days. I don't care a fig now for anything or anybody . . . and all life is to me a mistress who has abandoned me . . . for which I despise her, and am profoundly indifferent to her."

"You lie!"—says The Gnawed Bone.

"I lie?"—yells Aristíd Kuválda, red with wrath.

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“Why shout?”—rings out Martyánoff’s cold, gloomy bass.—“Why dispute? What do we care for either merchant or nobleman?”

“Inasmuch as we are neither one thing nor the other,” interpolates the deacon.

“Stop it, Gnawed Bone,”—says the teacher pacifically.—“Why salt a herring?”

He did not like quarrels, and, in general, did not like noise. When passions flared up around him, his lips were contorted in a painful grimace, and he calmly and persuasively endeavored to reconcile everybody with everybody else, and if he did not succeed in this, he left the company. Knowing this, the captain, if he was not particularly drunk, would restrain himself, as he was not desirous of losing, in the person of the teacher, the best listener to his speeches.

“I repeat,”—he continues, more quietly,—“I behold life in the hands of enemies, enemies not only of the noblemen, but enemies of every well-born man, greedy enemies, incapable of adorning life in any way . . .”

“Nevertheless, brother,”—says the teacher,—“the merchants created Genoa, Venice, Holland,—it was merchants, the merchants of England who won India for their country, the Counts Stróganoff . . .” \*

“What have I to do with those merchants? I have in view Judas Petúnnikoff, and along with him . . .”

“And what have you to do with them?” asks the teacher softly.

“Am not I alive? Aha! I am—hence I must feel indignant at the sight of the way in which the savage people who fill it are spoiling it.”

“And they laugh at the noble indignation of the cavalry

\* Yermák Timoféevitch, the conqueror of Siberia, was in the service of the Counts Stróganoff.—*Translator.*

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captain, and of the man on the retired list," teased The Gnawed Bone.

"Good! It's stupid, I agree. . . . As a man who has seen better days, I am bound to obliterate in myself all the feelings and thoughts which were formerly mine. That's true, I admit. . . . But wherewith shall I and all of you—wherewith shall we arm ourselves, if we discard these feelings?"

"Now you're beginning to talk sensibly," the teacher encourages him.

"We require something else, different views of life, different feelings . . . we require something new . . . for we ourselves are a novelty in life . . ."

"We undoubtedly do require that,"—says the teacher.

"Why?"—inquires The End.—"Isn't it all the same what we say or think? We haven't long to live . . . I'm forty years old, you're fifty . . . not one among us is under thirty. And even at twenty, you wouldn't live long such a life."

"And how are we a novelty?"—grins The Gnawed Bone.—"The naked brigade has always existed."

"And it founded Rome,"—says the teacher.

"Yes, of course,"—exults the captain.—"Romulus and Remus,—weren't they members of the Golden Squad of robbers? And we, also, when our hour comes, will found . . ."

"A breach of the public tranquillity and peace," interpolates The Gnawed Bone. He laughs loudly, pleased with himself. His laugh is evil, and soul-rending. Símtzoff, the deacon, and Tarás-and-a-Half join in. The ingenuous eyes of the dirty little lad Meteor burn with clear flame, and his cheeks flush. The End says, exactly as though he were pounding on their heads with a hammer:

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"All that's nonsense . . . dreams . . . rubbish!"

It was strange to see these people, driven out of life, tattered, impregnated with vodka and wrath, irony and dirt, thus engaged in discussion.

To the captain such conversations were decidedly a feast for the heart. He talked more than anybody else, and this afforded him the opportunity of thinking himself better than all the rest. But, no matter how low a man has fallen,—he will never deny himself the delight of feeling himself stronger, more sensible, although even better fed than his neighbor. Aristíd Kuválda abused this delight, but did not get surfeited with it, to the dissatisfaction of The Gnawed Bone, The Peg-top, and other "Have-beens," who took very little interest in such questions.

But, on the other hand, politics was a universal favorite. A conversation on the theme of the imperative necessity that India should be conquered, or about the repression of England, might go on interminably. With no less passion did they discuss the means for radically exterminating the Hebrews from the face of the earth, but in this question The Gnawed Bone always got the upper hand, and had concocted wonderfully harsh projects, and the captain, who always wished to be the leading personage, avoided this theme. They talked readily, much, and evilly of women, but the teacher always came to their rescue, and got angry if they smeared it on too thickly. They yielded to him, for they all regarded him as an extraordinary man, and they borrowed from him, on Saturdays, the money which he had earned during the week.

Altogether, he enjoyed many privileges: for example, they did not beat him on those rare occasions when the discussion wound up in a universal thrashing match. He

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was permitted to bring women to the night lodging-house; no one else enjoyed that right, for the captain warned everyone:

“Don’t you bring any women to my house. . . . Women, merchants, and philosophy are the three causes of my bad luck. I’ll give any man a sound drubbing whom I see making his appearance with a woman . . . and I’ll thrash the woman too. . . . For indulging in philosophy, I’ll tear off the offender’s head. . . .”

He could tear off a head: in spite of his age, he possessed astonishing strength. Moreover, every time that he fought, he was aided by Martyánoff. Gloomy and taciturn as a grave-stone, when a general fight was in progress the latter always placed himself back to back with Kuválda, and then they formed an all-destroying and indestructible machine.

One day, drunken Símtzoff, without rhyme or reason, wound his talons in the teacher’s hair and pulled out a lock of it. Kuválda, with one blow of his fist, laid him out senseless for half an hour, and when he came to himself he made him eat the teacher’s hair. The man ate it, fearing that he would be beaten to death.

In addition to reading the newspaper, discussions, and fighting, card-playing formed one of their diversions. They played without Martyánoff, because he could not play honestly, which he announced himself, after he had been caught several times cheating.

“I can’t help smuggling a card. . . . It’s my habit. . . .”

“That does happen,”—deacon Tarás confirmed his statement.—“I got into the habit of beating my wife after the Liturgy on Sundays; so, you know, when she died, such sadness overpowered me on Sundays as is even in-

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credible. I lived through one Sunday, and I saw that things were bad! Another—I bore it. On the third—I hit my cook one blow. . . . She took offence. . . . ‘Ill hand you over to the justice of the peace,’ says she. Imagine my position! On the fourth Sunday I thrashed her as though she were my wife! Then I paid her ten rubles, and went on beating her after the plan I had established until I got married . . . .” \*

“Deacon,—you lie! How could you marry a second time?”—The Gnawed Bone interrupted him.

“Hey? Why I did it so . . . . she looked after my household affairs . . . .”

“Did you have any children?”—the teacher asked him.

“Five. . . . One was drowned. . . . The eldest, . . . . he was an amusing little boy! Two died of diphtheria. . . . One daughter married some student or other, and went with him to Siberia, and the other wanted to educate herself, and died in Peter † . . . . of consumption, they say. . . . Ye-es . . . . there were five of them . . . . of course! We ecclesiastics are fruitful . . . .”

He began to explain precisely why this was so, arousing homeric laughter by his narration. When they had laughed until they were tired, Alexéi Máximovitch Símtzoff remembered that he, also, had a daughter.

“Her name was Lídka. . . . She was such a fat girl . . . .”

\* The Parish (or White) Clergy, in the Holy Orthodox Church of the East, beginning with the rank of Sub-Deacon, must be married—and must be married before they are ordained. They cannot marry again. This rule ceases with an Arch-Priest, which is the highest rank attainable by the White Clergy. Bishops must be celibates.—*Translator.*

† The colloquial abbreviation for St. Petersburg.—*Translator.*

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And it must have been that he could recall nothing further, for he stared at them all, smiled apologetically . . . and stopped talking.

These people talked little with one another about their pasts, referred to them very rarely, and always in general terms, and in a more or less sneering tone. Possibly, such an attitude toward the past was wise, for, to the majority of people, the memory of the past relaxes energy in the present, and undermines hope for the future.

But on rainy, overcast, cold days of autumn, these people with pasts assembled in Vavíloff's tavern. There they were known, somewhat feared, as thieves and bullies, rather despised as desperate drunkards, but, at the same time, they were respected and listened to, being regarded as very clever people. Vavíloff's tavern was the Club of Vyézhaya Street, and the men with pasts were the intelligent portion of the Club.

On Saturday evenings, on Sundays from morning until night, the tavern was full, and the people with a past were welcome guests there. They brought with them, into the midst of the inhabitants of the street, ground down with poverty and woe, their spirit, which contained some element that lightened the lives of these people, exhausted and distracted in their pursuit of a morsel of bread, drunkards of the same stamp as the denizens of Kuválda's refuge, and outcasts from the town equally with them. Skill in talking about everything and ridiculing everything, fearlessness of opinion, harshness of speech, the absence of fear in the presence of that which the entire street feared, the challenging audacity of these men—could not fail to please the street. Moreover, nearly all of them knew the laws, were able to give any bit of advice, write a petition,



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help in cheating with impunity. For all this they were paid with vódka, and flattering amazement at their talents.

In their sympathies, the street was divided into two nearly equal parties: one asserted that the "captain was a lot more of a man than the teacher, a real warrior! His bravery and brains were huge!" The other party was convinced that the teacher, in every respect, "tipped the scales" over Kuválda. Kuválda's admirers were those petty burghers who were known to the street as thorough-going drunkards, thieves, and hair-brained fellows, to whom the path from the beggar's wallet to the prison did not seem a dangerous road. The teacher was admired by the more steady-going people, who cherished hopes of something, who expected something, who were eternally busy about something, and were rarely full-fed. The character of the relations of Kuválda and the teacher toward the street is accurately defined by the following example. One day, the subject under discussion in the tavern was an ordinance of the city council, by which the inhabitants of Vyézhaya Street were bound: to fill up the ruts and holes in their street, but not to employ manure and the corpses of domestic animals for that purpose, but to apply to that end only broken bricks and rubbish from the place where some buildings were in process of erection.

"Where am I to get those same broken bricks, if, during the whole course of my life I never have wanted to build anything but a starling-house, and haven't yet got ready even for that?"—plaintively remarked Mokéi Anísimoff, a man who peddled rusks, which his wife baked for him.

The captain felt himself called upon to express his opinion upon the matter in hand, and banged his fist down upon the table, thereby attracting attention to himself.

"Where are you to get broken bricks and rubbish? Go,

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my lads, the whole street-full of you, into town, and pull down the city hall. It's so old that it's not fit for anything. Thus you will render double service in beautifying the town—you will make Vyézhaya Street decent, and you will force them to build a new city hall. Take the Mayor's horses to cart the stuff, and seize his three daughters—they're girls thoroughly suited to harness. Or tear down the house of Judas Petúnnikoff, and pave the street with wood. By the way, Mokéi, I know what your wife used to-day to bake your rolls:—the shutters from the third window, and two steps from the porch of Judas' house."

When the audience had laughed their fill and had exercised their wits on the captain's proposition, staid market-gardener Pavliúgin inquired:

"But what are we to do, anyway, Your Well-Born?  
. . . Hey? What do you think? . . ."

"I? Don't move hand or foot! If the street gets washed away—well, let it!"

"Several houses are about to tumble down . . ."

"Don't hinder them, let them tumble down! If they do—squeeze a contribution out of the town; if it won't give it,—go ahead and sue it! Whence does the water flow? From the town? Well, then the town is responsible for the destruction of the houses . . ."

"They say the water comes from the rains . . ."

"But the houses in the town don't tumble down on account of that? Hey? It extorts taxes from you, and gives you no voice in discussing your rights! It ruins your lives and your property, and then makes you do the repairs! Thrash it from the front and the rear!"

And one half of the street, convinced by the radical Kuválda, decided to wait until their wretched hovels should be washed away by rain-water from the town.

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The more sedate persons found in the teacher a man who drew up a capital and convincing statement to the city council on their behalf.

In this statement the refusal of the street to comply with the city council's ordinance was so solidly founded that the council granted it. The street was permitted to use the rubbish which was left over from repairs to the barracks, and five horses from the fire-wagon were assigned to them to cart it.\* More than this—it was recognized as indispensable that, in due course, a drain-pipe should be laid through the street. This, and many other things, created great popularity in the street for the teacher. He wrote petitions, printed remarks in the newspapers. Thus, for example, one day Vavíloff's patrons noticed that the herrings and other victuals in Vavíloff's tavern were entirely unsuited to their purpose. And so, two days later, as Vavíloff stood at his lunch-counter, newspaper in hand, he publicly repented.

“It's just—that's the only thing I can say! It's a fact that I did buy rusty herrings, herrings that weren't quite good. And the cabbage—had rather forgotten itself . . . that's so! Everybody knows that every man wants to chase as many five-kopék pieces into his pocket as possible. Well, and what of that? It has turned out exactly the other way; I made the attempt, and a clever man has held me up to public scorn for my greed. . . . Quits!”

This repentance produced a very good impression on the public, and furnished Vavíloff with the opportunity of

\* The reference here, is to the flattened barrels, mounted on wheels, into which water is drawn from the street-hydrants, and from which it is pumped on a conflagration by means of hand-engines. There are, also, a certain number of steam fire-engines in some of the large towns.—*Translator.*

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feeding the public with the herrings and the cabbage, and all this the public devoured unheeding to the sauce of their own impressions. A very significant fact, for it not only augmented the prestige of the teacher, but it made the residents acquainted with the power of the printed word. It happened that the teacher was reading a lecture on practical morals in the tavern. "I saw you,"—said he, addressing the painter Yáshka Tiúrin,—“I saw you, Yákoff, beating your wife . . . .”

Yáshka had already “touched himself up” with two glasses of vódka, and was in an audaciously free-and-easy mood. The public looked at him, in the expectation that he would immediately surprise them with some wild trick, and silence reigned in the tavern.

“You saw me, did you? And were you pleased?”—inquired Yáshka.

The audience laughed discreetly.

“No, I wasn’t,”—replied the teacher. His tone was so impressively serious that the audience kept quiet.

“It struck me that I was doing my best,”—Yáshka braved it out, foreseeing that the teacher would “floor” him.—“My wife was satisfied . . . she can’t get up to-day . . . .”

The teacher thoughtfully traced some figures on the table with his finger, and as he inspected them he said:

“You see, Yákoff, the reason I’m not pleased is this. . . . Let’s make a thorough examination into what you are doing, and what you may expect from it. Your wife is with child: you beat her, yesterday, on her body and on her sides—which means, that you beat not only her, but the baby also. You might have killed him, and your wife would have died in childbed, or from this, or have fallen into very bad health. It’s unpleasant and troublesome to

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worry over a sick wife, and it will cost you dear, for illness requires medicines, and medicines require money. But if you haven't yet killed the child, you certainly have crippled it, and perhaps it will be born deformed; lop-sided, or hunchbacked. That means, that it will not be fit to work, but it is important for you that he should be a worker. Even if he is born merely ailing,—and that's bad—he will tie his mother down, and require doctoring. Do you see what you have prepared for yourself? People who live by the toil of their hands ought to be born healthy, and ought to bring forth healthy children. . . . Am I speaking the truth?"

"Yes,"—the audience backed him up.

"Well, I don't think . . . that will happen,"—said Yáshka, somewhat abashed at the prospect as depicted by the teacher.—"She's healthy . . . you can't get through her to the child, can you now? For she, the devil, is an awful witch!"—he exclaimed bitterly. "As soon as I do anything . . . she starts in to nag at me, as rust gnaws iron!"

"I understand, Yákoff, that you can't help beating your wife,"—the teacher's calm, thoughtful voice made itself heard again;—"you have many causes for that. . . . It's not your wife's character that is to blame for your beating her so incautiously . . . but your whole sad and gloomy life. . . ."

"There, now, that's so,"—ejaculated Yákoff,—“we really do live in darkness like that in the bosom of a chimney-sweep."

"You're enraged at life in general, but your wife suffers . . . your wife, the person who is nearest to you—and suffers without being to blame toward you, simply because you are stronger than she is; she is always at your

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elbow, she has no place to go to get away from you. You see how . . . foolish . . . it is!"

"So it is . . . devil take her! And what am I to do? Ain't I a man?"

"Exactly so, you are a man! . . . Well, this is what I want to say to you: beat her, if you must, if you can't get along without it, but beat her cautiously: remember, that you may injure her health, or the health of the child. In general, it is never right to beat women who are with child . . . on the body, the breast, or the sides . . . beat her on the neck, or take a rope, and . . . strike on the soft places. . . ."

The orator finished his speech, and his deeply-sunken, dark eyes gazed at his audience, and seemed to be apologizing to them or guiltily asking them about something.

And the audience rustled with animation. This morality of a man who had seen better days, the morality of the dram-shop and of misery, was comprehensible to it.

"Well, brother Yáshka, do you understand?"

"That's what the truth is like!"

Yákoff understood: to beat his wife incautiously was—injurious to himself.

He said nothing, replying to his comrades' jeers with an abashed smile.

"And then again—what is a wife?"—philosophized rusk-peddler Mokéi Anísimoff:—"A wife's a friend, if you get rightly at the root of the matter. She's in the nature of a chain, that has been riveted on you for life . . . and both you and she are, after a fashion, hard-labor convicts. So try to walk evenly, in step with her . . . and if you can't, you will feel the chain . . ."

"Hold on,"—said Yákoff,—“you beat your wife, too, don't you?"

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“And did I say that I didn’t? I do. . . . One can’t get along otherwise. . . . Whom have I to thump my fists against—the wall?—when I can’t endure things any longer?”

“Well, there then, it’s the same way with me . . . .” said Yákov.

“Well, what a cramped and doleful life is ours, my brethren! We haven’t space anywhere for a regular good swing of our arms!”

“And you must even beat your wife with care!”—moaned someone humorously. And thus they went on talking until late at night, or until they fell into a fight, which arose on the basis of intoxication, or of the moods which these discussions inspired.

The rain dashed against the windows of the tavern, and the cold wind howled wildly. Inside the tavern the air was close, impregnated with smoke, but warm; outside all was damp, cold, and dark. The wind beat upon the windows, as though it were impudently summoning all these men forth from the tavern, and threatening to disperse them over the earth, like dust. Sometimes, amid its roar, a repressed, hopeless groan became audible, and then a cold, cruel laugh rang out. This music prompted to melancholy thoughts about the close approach of winter, the accursed short days without sunshine, the long nights, and the indispensable necessity of having warm clothing and plenty to eat. One sleeps so badly on an empty stomach during the endless winter nights. Winter was coming, coming. . . . How were they to live?

These sorrowful meditations evoked in the inhabitants of Vyézhaya Street an augmented thirst, and in the speeches of the men with pasts the quantity of sighs increased and the number of wrinkles on their foreheads,

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their voices became duller, their relations to one another more blunt. And all of a sudden, savage wrath blazed up among them, the exasperation of outcasts, tortured by their harsh fate, awoke. Or they were conscious of the approach of that implacable enemy, which converted their whole life into one cruel piece of stupidity. But this enemy was intangible, for it was invisible.

And so they thrashed one another; they thrashed mercilessly, they thrashed savagely, and again, having made peace, they began to drink, drinking up everything that Vavíloff, who was not very exacting, would accept as a pledge.

Thus, in dull wrath, in sadness which clutched at their hearts, in ignorance as to the outcome of their wretched existence, they passed the autumnal days, in anticipation of the still more inclement days of winter.

At such times, Kuválda came to their aid with philosophy.

“Don’t get down in the mouth, my boys! There’s an end to everything—that’s the merit of life.—The winter will pass, and summer will come again . . . a splendid season, when, they say, the sparrows have beer.”—But his harangues had no effect—a starving man cannot be fed to satiety with a swallow of water.

Deacon Tarás also tried to divert the public, by singing songs and narrating his stories. He was more successful. Sometimes his efforts led to the result that desperate, audacious mirth bubbled up in the tavern; they sang, danced, roared with laughter, and, for the space of several hours, resembled madmen. Only . . .

And then again they fell back into dull, indifferent despair, and sat around the tavern tables, in the soot of the lamps and tobacco-smoke, morose, tattered, languidly chat-



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ting together, listening to the triumphant howl of the gale, and meditating as to how they might get a drink of vódka, and drink until they lost their senses.

And all of them were profoundly opposed to each, and each concealed within himself unreasonable wrath against all.

### II.

Everything is comparative in this world, and there is for man no situation so utterly bad that nothing could be worse.

On a bright day, toward the end of September, Captain Aristíd Kuválda was sitting, as was his wont, in his arm-chair at the door of the night lodging-house, and as he gazed at the stone\* building erected by merchant Petún-nikoff, next door to Vavíloff's tavern, he meditated.

The building, which was still surrounded by scaffolding, was intended for a candle-factory, and had long been an eye-sore to the captain, with the empty and dark hollows of its long row of windows, and that spider's web of wood, which surrounded it, from foundation to roof. Red, as though it were smeared with blood, it resembled some cruel machine, which was not yet in working-order, but which had already opened a row of deep, yawning maws, and was ready to engulf, masticate, and devour. Vavíloff's gray wooden tavern, with its crooked roof, overgrown with moss, leaned against one of the brick walls of the factory, and looked like some huge parasite, which was driving its suckers into it.

\* "A stone building" does not mean literally stone in Russia, as it does elsewhere. "Stone," in this connection, means brick, rubble, or any other substance, with an external dressing of mastic, washed with white or any gay hue. Briefly, not of wood.—*Translator.*

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The captain reflected, that they would soon begin to build on the site of the old house also. They would tear down the lodging-house, too. He would be compelled to seek other quarters, and no others, so convenient and so cheap, could be found. It was a pity, it was rather sad, to move away from a place where he had been so long. But move he must, merely because a certain merchant had taken it into his head to manufacture candles and soap. And the captain felt, that if any opportunity should present itself to him, of ruining the life of that enemy, even temporarily—oh! with what delight would he ruin it!

On the previous evening, merchant Iván Andréevitch Petúnnikoff had been in the courtyard of the night lodging-house with the architect and his son. They had measured the courtyard, and had stuck little sticks everywhere in the ground, which, after Petúnnikoff had departed, the captain ordered The Meteor to pull out of the ground and throw away.

Before the captain's eyes stood that merchant—small, gaunt, in a long garment which simultaneously resembled both an overcoat and an undercoat, in a velvet cap, and tall, brilliantly-polished boots. His bony face, with high cheek-bones, with its gray, wedge-shaped beard, with a lofty brow furrowed with wrinkles, from beneath which sparkled small, narrow, gray eyes, which always appeared to be on the watch for something. . . . A pointed, cartilaginous nose, a small mouth, with thin lips. . . . Altogether, the merchant's aspect was piously-rapacious, and respectably-evil.

“A damned mixture of fox and hog!”—swore the captain to himself, and recalled to mind Petúnnikoff's first phrase with regard to himself. The merchant had come with a member of the town court to purchase the house,

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and, catching sight of the captain, he had asked of his guide, in alert Kostromá dialect:

“Isn’t he a candle-end himself . . . that lodger of yours?”

And from that day forth—now eighteen months gone by—they had vied with one another in their cleverness at insulting man.

And on the preceding evening, a little “drill in vituperation,” as the captain designated his conversation with the merchant, had taken place between them. After he had seen the architect off, the merchant had stepped up to the captain.

“You’re sitting?”—he asked, tugging with his hand at the visor of his cap so that it was not possible to understand whether he was adjusting it or intended to express a salutation.

“You’re trotting about?”—said the captain, imitating his tone, and made a movement with his lower jaw, which caused his beard to waggle, and which a person who was not exacting might take for a bow, or for a desire on the part of the captain to shift his pipe from one corner of his mouth to the other.

“I have a great deal of money—so I trot about. Money demands that it shall be put out in life, so I’m giving it circulation . . .” the merchant mocked the captain a little, cunningly narrowing his little eyes.

“The ruble doesn’t serve you, that is to say, but you serve the ruble,”—commented Kuválda, contending with a desire to give the merchant a kick in the belly.

“Isn’t it all the same thing? With it, with money, everything is agreeable. . . . But if you haven’t any . . .”

And the merchant eyed the captain over, with shame-

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lessly-counterfeit compassion. The captain's upper lip twitched, disclosing his large, wolfish teeth.

"A man who has brains and conscience can get along without it. . . It generally makes its appearance precisely at the time when a man's conscience begins to dry up. . . The less conscience, the more money . . ."

"That's true. . . . But, on the other hand, there are people who have neither money, nor conscience . . ."

"Were you just the same when you were young?"—inquired Kuválda innocently. It was now the turn of Petúnnikoff's nose to twitch. Iván Andréévitch sighed, screwed up his little eyes, and said:

"In my youth, o-okh! I was forced to raise great weights!"

"I think . . ."

"I worked, okh, how I worked!"

"And you worked up a good many people!"

"Such as you? Noblemen? Never mind . . . they learned plenty of prayers to Christ from me . . ."

"You didn't murder, you merely stole?"—said the captain sharply. Petúnnikoff turned green, and found it expedient to change the subject.

"You're a bad host, you sit, while your guest stands."

"Let him sit down, too," Kuválda gave permission.

"But there's nothing to sit on, you see . . ."

"Sit on the earth . . . the earth accepts all sorts of rubbish . . ."

"I see that, from you. . . . But I shall leave you, you scold," said Petúnnikoff, in a calm, equable voice, but his eyes poured forth cold poison on the captain.

And he took his departure, leaving Kuválda with the pleasing consciousness that the merchant was afraid of him. If he had not been afraid of him, he would long

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ago have driven him out of the night lodging-house. He would not have refrained from expelling him for those five rubles a month! And the captain found it pleasant to stare at Petúnnikoff's back, as he slowly left the courtyard. Then the captain watched the merchant walk around his factory, walk over the scaffoldings, upstairs and down. And he longed greatly to have the merchant fall and break his bones. How many clever combinations he had made of the fall, and the injuries, as he gazed at Petúnnikoff climbing over the scaffoldings of his factory, like a spider over his web! On the preceding evening, it had even seemed to him that one plank trembled under the merchant's feet, and the captain sprang from his seat in excitement. . . . But nothing happened.

And to-day, as always, before the eyes of Aristíd Kuválda rose aloft that red building, so well-built, and solid, which had laid as firm a hold upon the earth as though it were already sucking the juices out of it. And it seemed to be laughing coldly and gloomily at the captain, with the yawning holes of its walls. The sun poured its autumnal rays upon it as lavishly as upon the wretched hovels of Vyézhaya Street.

"Is it really going to happen!"—exclaimed the captain mentally, as he measured the wall of the factory with his eye.—"Akh, you rascal, devil take you! If . . ." and all startled and excited by his thought, Aristíd Kuválda sprang up, and went hastily into Vavíloff's tavern, smiling and muttering something to himself.

Vavíloff met him at the lunch-counter, with the friendly exclamation:

"We wish health to Your Well-Born!"

Of medium height, with a bald head surrounded by a wreath of curly gray hair, with smoothly-shaven cheeks,

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and a mustache which bristled straight up, clad in a greasy leather jacket, by his every movement he permitted one to discern in him the former non-commissioned officer.

“Egór! Have you the deed of sale and the plan of the house?” inquired Kuválda hastily.

“I have.”

Vavíloff suspiciously narrowed his knavish eyes, and rivetted them intently on the face of the captain, in which he perceived something particular.

“Show them to me!”—cried the captain, banging the counter with his fist, and dropping upon a stool alongside it.

“Why?”—asked Vavíloff, who had made up his mind, on beholding Kuválda’s excitement, that he would be on his guard.

“Bring them here quick, you blockhead!”

Vavíloff wrinkled up his brow, and raised his eyes scrutinizingly to the ceiling.

“Where have I put them, those same papers?”

He found on the ceiling no information on that point; then the non-commissioned officer fixed his eyes on his stomach, and with an aspect of anxious meditation, began to drum on the bar with his fingers.

“Stop making faces!” shouted the captain at him, for he did not like the man, considering the former soldier to be more adapted for a thief than for a tavern-keeper.

“Well, I’ve just called it to mind, ’Ristíd Fómitch. It appears that they were left in the district court. When I entered into possession . . .”

“Drop that, Egórka! \* In view of your own profit, show me immediately the plan, the deed of purchase, and

\* Diminutive of Egór (George).—*Translator.*

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everything there is! Perhaps you'll make several hundred rubles out of this—do you understand?"

Vavíloff understood nothing, but the captain spoke so impressively, with such a serious mien, that the under-officer's eyes began to blaze with burning curiosity, and, saying that he would look and see whether he had not the documents packed away in the house, he went out of the door behind the lunch-counter. Two minutes later, he returned with the documents in his hands, and with an expression of extreme amazement on his face.

"On the contrary, the cursed things were in the house!"

"Ekh, you . . . clown from a show-booth! And yet he used to be a soldier. . . ." Kuválda did not let slip the opportunity to reproach him, as he snatched from his hands a calico-covered pasteboard box, with the blue title-deed. Then, unfolding the papers in front of him and still further exciting the curiosity of Vavíloff, the captain began to read, scrutinize, and at the same time to bellow in a very significant manner. At last he rose with decision, and went to the door, leaving the documents on the bar, and nodded to Vavíloff.

"Hold on . . . don't put them away. . . ."

Vavíloff gathered up the documents, laid them in the drawer of the counter, locked it and gave it a jerk with his hand,—to make sure that it was locked. Then, thoughtfully rubbing his bald spot, he emerged on the porch of the tavern. There he beheld the captain, after pacing off the front of the building, snap his fingers and again begin to measure off the same line, anxious but not satisfied.

Vavíloff's face assumed a rather strained expression, then relaxed, then suddenly beamed with joy.

"'Ristíd Fómitch! Is it possible?"—he exclaimed, when the captain came opposite him.

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"There's no 'is it possible' about it! More than an arshín \* has been cut off. That's on the front line, and as to the depth, I'll find that out directly. . . ."

"The depth? . . . ten fathoms, twenty-eight inches!"

"So you've caught the idea, you shaven-face?"

"Certainly, 'Ristíd Fómitch! Well, what an eye you have—you can see three arshíns into the earth!" cried Vavíloff in ecstasy.

A few minutes later, they were sitting opposite each other in Vavíloff's room, and the captain, as he annihilated beer in huge gulps, said to the tavern-keeper:

"So, all the walls of the factory stand on your land. Act without any mercy. The teacher will come, and we'll draw up a petition in haste to the district judge. In order not to waste money on stamped paper, we'll fix the value of the suit at the most modest figure, and we'll ask to have the building torn down. This, you fool, is infringing on the boundaries of another man's property . . . a very pleasant event for you! Tear away! And to tear down and remove such a huge thing is an expensive job. Effect a compromise! You just squeeze Judas! We'll reckon up, in the most accurate manner, how much it will cost to tear it down—with the pressed brick, and the pit under the new foundation . . . we'll reckon it all up! We'll even take our time into account! And—please to hand over two tho-ou-sand rubles, pious Judas!"

"He won't give it!"—said Vavíloff slowly, anxiously, winking his eyes, which were sparkling with greedy fire.

"You're mistaken! He will give it! Stir up your brains—what can he do? Tear it down? But—see here, Egórka,

\* An arshín (the Russian equivalent of the yard) is twenty-eight inches.—*Translator.*



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don't you lower your price! They'll buy you—don't sell yourself cheap! They'll try to frighten you—don't be afraid! Trust in us . . . .”

The captain's eyes blazed with savage joy, and his face, crimson with excitement, twitched convulsively. He had kindled the tavern-keeper's greed, and exhorting him to act as promptly as possible, he went away, triumphant and implacably-ferocious.

In the evening, all the men with pasts learned of the captain's discovery, and, as they hotly discussed the future actions of Petúnnikoff, they depicted, in vivid colors, his amazement and wrath on the day when the messenger of the court should hand him a copy of the complaint. The captain felt himself a hero. He was happy, and everyone around him was contented. The big throng of dark figures, clad in rags, lay in the courtyard, and buzzed, and exulted, being enlivened by the event. They all knew merchant Petúnnikoff, who had passed before them many a time. Scornfully screwing up his eyes, he bestowed upon them the same sort of attention that he did on any other sort of rubbish, strewn about the courtyard. He reeked with good living, which irritated them, and even his boots shone with scorn for them all. And now, one of them was about to deal this merchant a severe blow in his pocket and his self-conceit. Wasn't that good?

Mischief, in the eyes of these people, had much that was attractive about it. It was the sole weapon which fitted their hand and their strength. Each one of them had long ago reared up within him a half-conscious, confused sentiment of keen hostility toward all people who were well-fed and were not clad in rags, and in each one of them this sentiment was in a different stage of its develop-

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ment. This it was, which evoked in all the men with pasts a burning interest in the war that Kuválda had declared against merchant Petúnnikoff.

For two weeks the night lodging-house lived in expectation of fresh occurrences, and during that whole period Petúnnikoff never once made his appearance at the new building. They found out that he was not in town, and that the copy of the petition had not yet been served on him. Kuválda battered away at the practice of the town court procedure. It is not probable that that merchant has been ever, or by anyone awaited with such strained impatience as that with which the vagrants awaited him.

“He cometh not, he cometh not, my da-ar-ling . . .”

“Ekh, it means that he lo-o-oves me not!”—sang Deacon Tarás, thrusting out his cheek in humorously-afflicted fashion, as he gazed up the hill.

And lo! one day, toward evening, Petúnnikoff made his appearance. He arrived in a well-built little cart, with his son in the rôle of coachman—a rosy-cheeked young fellow, in a long, checked overcoat, and dark glasses. They tied their horse to the scaffolding;—the son took from his pocket a tape-measure in a case, gave the end to his father, and they began to measure off the land, both silent and anxious.

“Aha-a!” ejaculated the captain triumphantly.

All who were present in the lodging-house poured out to the gate, and looked on, audibly expressing their opinions as to what was taking place.

“That’s the result of being in the habit of stealing—a man steals even by mistake, without any desire to steal, at the risk of losing more than he steals . . .” condoled

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the captain, calling forth laughter and a series of similar remarks from his staff.

“Oï, young fellow!”—exclaimed Petúnnikoff, at last, irritated by the sneers,—“look out that I don’t drag you before the judge of the peace for your words!”

“Nothing will come of that without witnesses . . . your own son can’t testify on behalf of his father . . .” said the captain warningly.

“Well, look out, all the same! You’re a gallant bandit-chief, but we’ll manage to get satisfaction from you, nevertheless!”

And Petúnnikoff made a menacing gesture with his finger. . . . His son, composed and absorbed in his calculations, paid no heed to this pack of shady individuals, who were maliciously amusing themselves at his father’s expense. He did not so much as once glance in their direction.

“The young spider has had good training,”—remarked The Gnawed Bone, who was minutely watching all the actions and movements of the younger Petúnnikoff.

After taking the measurements of everything that was required, Iván Andréévitch scowled, seated himself in silence in his cart, and drove off, but his son went, with firm tread, toward Vavíloff’s tavern, and disappeared inside it.

“Oho! He’s a resolute young thief . . . yes! Come now, what will happen next?” asked Kuválda.

“The next thing is, that Petúnnikoff junior will buy Egór Vavíloff . . .” said The Gnawed Bone confidently, and he smacked his lips delicately, expressing complete satisfaction on his sharp face.

“You’re glad of that, are you?”—inquired Kuválda harshly.

“It pleases me to see how folks are deceived in their

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reckoning," explained The Gnawed Bone with delight, screwing up his eyes and rubbing his hands.

The captain spat angrily, and made no reply. And all of them, as they stood at the gateway of the half-ruined house, maintained silence, and stared at the door of the tavern. An hour and more passed in this expectant silence. Then the door of the tavern opened, and Petúnnikoff emerged from it, as calm as when he had entered it. He halted for a minute, coughed, turned up his coat-collar, glanced at the men who were watching him, and went up the street toward the town.

The captain followed him with his eyes, and, turning to The Gnawed Bone, he grinned.

"I guess you were right, you son of a scorpion and a wood-louse. . . . You have a good nose for everything rascally . . . that you have. . . . It's evident, from the ugly phiz of that young sharper alone, that he has got his own way. . . . How much did Egórka get out of them? He got something. . . . He's a bird of the same feather as they. He took something, may I be thrice damned if he didn't! I arranged things for him. 'Tis bitter for me to realize my stupidity. Yes, life is all against us, my brethren, scoundrels! And even when you spit in your neighbor's eye, the spittle flies back into your own eyes."

Comforting himself with this sentiment, the worthy captain inspected his staff. All were disenchanted, for all felt that what had taken place between Vavíloff and Petúnnikoff had not been what they had anticipated. And all were incensed at this. The consciousness of inability to cause evil is more offensive to a man than the consciousness of the impossibility to do good, because it is so easy and simple to do evil.

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“So,—what are we staying here for? There’s nothing more for us to expect . . . except the bargain-treat, which I’m going to get out of Egórka . . .” said the captain, staring at the tavern with a scowl. . . . “The end has come to our prosperous and peaceful life \* under the roof of Judas. Judas will trample us under foot. . . . Of which I make announcement to the department of the unclad vagabonds entrusted to my care . . .”

The End laughed gloomily.

“What are you laughing at, you jail-warden?”—inquired Kuválda.

“Where am I to go?”

“That’s a big question, my dear soul. . . . Your fate will answer it for you, don’t be uneasy,”—said the captain thoughtfully, as he went toward the lodging-house. The men with pasts moved slowly after him.

“We will await the critical moment,” said the captain, as he walked along among them.—“When they pitch us out of this, we’ll hunt up another den for ourselves. But, in the meanwhile, it doesn’t pay to spoil life with such thoughts. . . . At critical moments, a man becomes more energetic . . . and if life, with all its combinations, would make the critical moment more frequent, if a man were forced every second to tremble for the safety of his sound pate . . . by God, life would be more lively, and people would be more interesting!”

“That is to say, they would gnaw at one another’s throats with more fury,”—explained The Gnawed Bone, with a smile.

\* “Prosperous and peaceful life” is a (sarcastic) quotation from the “Many Years” (Long Life), which is proclaimed in church, at the end of the service, on special occasions, in honor of royal or distinguished persons.—*Translator*.

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"Well, and what if they did?"—angrily exclaimed the captain, who was not fond of having his ideas explained.

"Why, nothing . . . that's good. When people want to get anywhere more quickly, they lash the horses with the whip, and exasperate machines with fire."

"Well, that's it! Let everything gallop to the devil far away! It would please me if the earth were suddenly to blaze up, and burn to ashes, or explode into fragments . . . on condition that I was the last to perish, and might look on at the others first . . ."

"That's savage!" grinned The Gnawed Bone.

"What of it? I'm a man who has seen better days . . . isn't that so? I'm an outcast—which means, that I'm free from all beaten paths and fetters. . . . It means, that I don't care a fig for anything! By the manner of my life, I'm bound to fling aside everything old . . . all manners and modes of relations to folks who exist well-fed, and finely dressed, and who despise me because I've fallen behind them in the matter of enough food and of costume . . . and I'm bound to breed within me something new—understand? The sort of thing, you know, which will make the lords of life, after the pattern of Judas Petúnnikoff, who pass me, feel a cold chill in their livers at the sight of my imposing form!"

"What a brave tongue you've got!"—laughed The Gnawed Bone.

"Ekh, you . . . paltry creature . . ." Kuválda eyed him over disdainfully. "What do you understand? What do you know? Do you know how to think? But I have thought . . . and I've read books, in which you wouldn't be able to understand a single word."

"I should think so! I couldn't sup cabbage-soup with a bast-slipper. . . . But though you have read books

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and thought, and I haven't done either, we've come out pretty close together . . . ."

"Go to the devil!"—shouted Kuválda.

His conversations with The Gnawed Bone always wound up in this manner. On the whole, without the teacher—and he was aware of this himself—his speeches only spoiled the air, and were dispersed on it without bringing him either appreciation or attention; but he could not refrain from talking. And now, after swearing at his interlocutor, he felt himself alone among his own people. But he wanted to talk, and therefore he turned to Símtzoff with the question:

"Well, and you, Alexéi Maxímovitch—where shall you lay your gray head?"

The old man smiled good-naturedly, rubbed his nose with his hand, and said:

"I don't know . . . I'll see about it! I'm of no great importance: I've had a good time, and I shall again!"

"A worthy, though simple problem,"—the captain lauded him.

Símtzoff added, after a pause, that he would get settled more promptly than the rest, because the women were very fond of him. This was true: the old man always had two or three mistresses among the women of the town, who supported him, for two or three days at a stretch, on their scanty earnings. They frequently beat him, but he bore it stoically; for some reason or other, they could not hurt him much—perhaps, because they were sorry for him. He was a passionate lover of women, and was wont to relate, that women were the cause of all his misfortunes in life. The intimacy of his relations to women, and the character of their relations to him were confirmed, both by his frequent illnesses, and by his clothing, which was

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always well mended, and cleaner than the clothing of his comrades. And now, as he sat on the ground, at the door of the lodging-house, in a circle of his comrades, he began boastfully to relate, that he had long since been invited by The Radish to live with her, but he would not go to her, he did not wish to desert the company.

He was listened to with interest, and not without envy. They all knew The Radish—she lived not far away, under the hill, and only a short time before this had spent several months in prison for her second case of theft. She was a wet-nurse, who “had seen better days,” a tall, plump country woman, with a pock-marked face, and very handsome, though always drunken, eyes.

“You don’t say so, you old devil!”—swore The Gnawed Bone, as he gazed at Símtzoff, who was smiling conceitedly.

“And why do they love me? Because I know what their souls delight in . . .”

“We-ell?”—exclaimed Kuválda, interrogatively.

“I know how to make them feel sorry for me. . . . And when a woman feels compassion—she’ll even go so far as to cut a throat out of compassion. Weep before her, beg her to kill you, she’ll take compassion on you and kill you . . .”

“I’ll kill!” declared Martyánoff, resolutely, grinning in his gloomy style.

“Whom?”—inquired The Gnawed Bone, moving away from him.

“It doesn’t matter . . . Petúnnikoff . . . Egórka . . . even you’d do!”

“Why?”—queried Kuválda, with great interest.

“I want to go to Siberia . . . I’m tired of this . . . mean life. . . . But there a fellow will find out how he ought to live . . .”



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"Ye-es, they'll show you there, in detail,"—assented the captain in a melancholy way.

Nothing more was said about Petúnnikoff, and their approaching expulsion from the night lodging-house. All of them were already convinced that this expulsion was near at hand—at a distance of two or three days, perhaps, and they regarded it as superfluous to bother themselves with discussions on that subject. Discussing the matter would not improve the situation, and, in conclusion, the weather was not cold yet, although the rains were beginning—it was still possible to sleep on any clod of earth, outside the town.

Arranging themselves in a circle on the grass, these men idly conducted a long conversation on various subjects, passing freely from one theme to another, and wasting just so much attention on the other man's words as was required to keep up the conversation without a break. It was tiresome to remain silent, but it was also tiresome to listen attentively. This company of men with pasts had one great merit: in it no one put any constraint upon himself, in the effort to appear better than he was, and no one incited the others to exercise such constraint over himself.

The August sun assiduously warmed the rags of these men, who had turned to it their backs and their uncombed heads—a chaotic combination of the vegetable kingdom with the mineral and the animal. In the corners of the courtyard the grass grew luxuriantly,—tall burdocks sown with clinging burs, and some other plants, which were of no use to anybody, delighted the eyes of the men who were of no use to anybody.

But in Vavíloff's tavern the following scene had been enacted.

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Petúnnikoff junior had entered it, in a leisurely manner, had looked about him, frowned fastidiously, and slowly removing from his head his gray hat, he had inquired of the tavern-keeper, who greeted him with a respectful bow, and an amiable grin:

“Egór Teréntievitch Vavíloff—are you he?”

“Exactly so!” \* replied the non-commissioned officer, resting both hands on the counter, as though preparing to leap over it.

“I have some business with you,”—announced Petúnnikoff.

“Perfectly delighted. . . . Please come to my rooms!”

They entered his rooms, and seated themselves—the visitor on the waxed-cloth divan in front of the round table, the host on a chair facing him. In one corner of the room burned a shrine-lamp in front of a huge, treble-panelled image-case, around which, on the wall, more holy pictures were also suspended. Their vestments were brilliantly polished, and shone like new ones. In the room, closely set with trunks, and ancient furniture of various sorts, there was an odor of olive oil, tobacco, and sour cabbage. Petúnnikoff surveyed things, and again made a grimace. Vavíloff, with a sigh, glanced at the holy pictures, and then they fixedly regarded each other, and both made a mutually good impression. Vavíloff’s frankly-knavish eyes pleased Petúnnikoff. Petúnnikoff’s open, cold, resolute face, with its broad, strong cheek-bones, and closely set white teeth, pleased Vavíloff.

“Well, sir, you know me, of course, and you can guess

\* The regulation reply, in the army, to a superior, is not plain “da” (yes), but “tótchno tak!” The negative is correspondingly regulated.  
—*Translator.*

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what I am going to talk to you about!" began Petúnnikoff.

"About the suit . . . I assume,"—said the non-commissioned officer deferentially.

"Precisely. It is pleasant to see that you make no pretences, but go straight to the point, like a man with a straight-forward soul,"—Petúnnikoff encouraged his interlocutor.

"I'm a soldier, sir . . ." said the latter, modestly.

"That's evident. So, we will conduct the business in a simple, straight-forward manner, in order to get through with it the more promptly."

"Just so . . ."

"Very good. . . . Your suit is entirely legal, and, as a matter of course, you will win it—that is the first thing which I consider it necessary to state to you."

"I thank you sincerely,"—said the non-commissioned officer, winking his eyes, in order to conceal the smile in them.

"But, tell me, why was it necessary for you to make acquaintance with us, your future neighbors, in so harsh a manner . . . straight from the courts? . . ."

Vavíloff shrugged his shoulders, and made no reply.

"It would have been simpler to come to us, and arrange everything peaceably . . . wouldn't it? What do you think about it?"

"Of course, that would be more agreeable. But, you see . . . there's one hitch about it. . . . I did not act of my own free will . . . but I was instigated to do it. . . . Afterward, when I understood what would have been the better way, it was already too late."

"Just so. . . . I assume that some lawyer or other put you up to it?"

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“Something of that sort . . . .”

“Aha! Well, sir, and so you wish to conclude the affair peaceably?”

“With the greatest pleasure!” exclaimed the soldier.

Petúnnikoff paused, looked at him, and then inquired, coldly and dryly:

“And why do you wish that?”

Vavíloff had not expected such a question, and could not reply at once. In his opinion, it was an absurd question, and the soldier, with a consciousness of his superiority, laughed in Petúnnikoff’s face.

“It’s plain enough why . . . . one must try to live at peace with people.”

“Come,”—Petúnnikoff interrupted him,—“that’s not precisely the fact. I perceive that you do not clearly understand why you wished to make peace with us. . . . I will tell you why.”

The soldier was somewhat astonished. This young fellow, all clad in checked material, and presenting a rather ridiculous figure in it, talked just as company commander Rakshín had been wont to talk, after he had, with angry hand, knocked out the soldiers’ teeth, three at a time.

“You want to make peace with us, because our vicinity is very profitable to you! And it is profitable because we shall have not less than one hundred and fifty workmen in our factory,—in course of time, more. If one hundred of them drink a glass apiece after each weekly pay-day, you will sell, in the course of a month, four hundred glasses more than you are selling now. I have put it at the lowest figure. Moreover, you have your eating-house. Apparently, you are anything but stupid, and you are a man of experience; consider for yourself the advantages of our proximity.”

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"That's true, sir . . ." Vaviloff nodded assent,—“I knew that.”

“And what then?”—the merchant inquired loudly.

“Nothing, sir. . . . Let's make peace.”

“I am very glad that you make up your mind so promptly. Here, I have furnished myself with a notification to the courts of the withdrawal of your claims against my father. Read it over, and sign it.”

Vaviloff stared, with round eyes, at his interlocutor, and trembled, foreseeing something very bad indeed.

“Excuse me . . . I am to sign it? What does that mean?”

“Simply, you are to write your baptismal name and your surname, and nothing more,”—explained Petúnnikoff, obligingly pointing out with his finger the place where he was to sign.

“No—what's the meaning of tha-at! I wasn't talking about that. . . . I meant to say—what compensation are you going to give me for my land?”

“But the land is of no use to you!” said Petúnnikoff, soothingly.

“Nevertheless, it's mine!” exclaimed the soldier.

“Of course. . . . How much do you want?”

“Why . . . what is stated in the complaint. . . .”

“What is written there,”—said Vaviloff timidly.

“Six hundred?”—Petúnnikoff laughed softly.—“Akh, you comical fellow!”

“I have the right . . . I might even demand two thousand . . . I can insist on your tearing down. . . . That's what I will do. . . . For the value of the suit is so small. I demand—that you shall tear the building down!”

“Go ahead. . . . Perhaps we will tear it down

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. . . three years hence, after having involved you in great expense for the suit. And after we have paid, we'll open our own little dram-shop and eating-house,—better ones than yours—and you'll be ruined, like the Swede at Poltáva.\* You shall be ruined, my good man, we'll take care of that. We might begin to take steps about the dram-shop now, only it's a bother, and time is valuable to us. And we're sorry for you—why take the bread away from a man, for no cause whatever? ”

Egór Teréntievitch set his teeth firmly, stared at his visitor, and felt conscious that the visitor was the master of his fate. Vavíloff commiserated himself, in the presence of this coldly-composed, implacable figure in the ridiculous checked costume.

“ Being in such close vicinity to us, and living in peace with us, my old soldier, you might do a fine business. We would take care of that, also. For example, I will even recommend you on the spot, to open a little shop . . . you know—cheap tobacco, matches, bread, cucumbers, and so on. . . . All that would have a ready sale.”

Vavíloff listened, and being anything but a stupid young fellow, he comprehended that the very best thing he could do would be to yield to his magnanimous enemy. He ought, properly, to have begun with that. And, not knowing how to get rid of his wrath and sense of injury, he swore aloud at Kuválda:

“ You drunkard, an-athema, may the devil give it to you! ”

“ You're swearing at the lawyer who drew up your petition? ”—calmly inquired Petúnnikoff, and added, with a sigh:—“ as a matter of fact, he might have played you a

\* Charles XII. of Sweden, defeated at Poltáva by Peter the Great.  
—*Translator.*

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sorry trick . . . if we had not taken pity on you."

"Ekh!" and the mortified soldier waved his hand in despair. "There are two of them. . . . One planned, the other wrote. . . . The damned correspondent!"

"And why do you call him a correspondent?"

"He writes in the newspapers. . . . They're your lodgers. . . . Nice people, truly! Get rid of them, drive them away, for Christ's sake! Robbers! They stir up everybody here in this street, they urge them on. There's no living for them . . . they're desperate men—the first you know, they'll rob you or set fire to your house!"

"And that correspondent—who is he?" Petúnnikoff asked with interest.

"He? A drunkard! He used to be a teacher—they turned him out. He drank up all he owned, . . . and now he writes for the papers, and composes petitions. He's a very mean man!"

"Hm! And so he wrote your petition for you? Exactly so! Evidently, it was he, also, who wrote about the disorders in construction—he found that the scaffolding was not properly placed, or something of that sort."

"It was he! I know it, it was he, the dog! He read it here, himself, and bragged—'Here, I've caused Petúnnikoff a loss,' says he."

"We-ell. . . . Come, sir, so we intend to make peace?"

"I make peace?"

The soldier hung his head and meditated.

"Ekh, thou gloomy life of ours!"—he exclaimed, in an injured tone, as he scratched the nape of his neck.

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"You must get some education," Petúnnikoff advised him, as he lighted a cigarette.

"Get some education? That's not the point, my good sir! There's no liberty, that's what's the trouble! No, look here, what sort of a life do I lead? I live in trepidation, . . . continually looking around me . . . completely deprived of freedom in the movements I wish to make! And why? I'm afraid . . . that spectre of a teacher writes about me in the newspapers . . . he brings the sanitary inspectors down on me, I have to pay fines. . . . The first you know, those lodgers of yours will burn down, murder, rob. . . . What can I do against them? They're not afraid of the police. . . . If the police locked them up, they'd even be glad of it—they'd get their bread for nothing . . ."

"We'll get rid of them . . . if we unite with you," promised Petúnnikoff.

"How are we to unite?" asked Vavíloff sadly and sullenly.

"Name your terms."

"But why? Give . . . six hundred, as stated in the claim . . ."

"Won't you take one hundred?"—inquired the merchant calmly, carefully scrutinizing his interlocutor, and smiling gently, he added:—"I won't give a ruble more."

After that, he removed his glasses, and began slowly to wipe them, with a handkerchief which he took from his pocket. Vavíloff gazed at him with grief in his heart, and, at the same time, was impressed with respect for him. In the calm countenance of young Petúnnikoff, in his gray eyes, in his broad cheek-bones, in the whole of his well-built figure, there was a great deal of strength, self-reliant and well disciplined by his brain. The way Petúnnikoff



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had talked to him also pleased Vavíloff: simply with friendly tones in his voice, without any pretensions to superiority, as though with his own brother, although Vavíloff understood that he, a soldier, was not the peer of that man. As he scrutinized him, almost admired him, the soldier, at last, could not hold out, and feeling within him an impulse of curiosity, which, for the moment, smothered all his sentiments, he deferentially asked Petúnnikoff:

“Where were you pleased to be educated?”

“In the technological institute. Why?” and the latter turned smiling eyes upon him.

“Nothing, sir, I only . . . excuse me!”—The soldier dropped his head, and suddenly, with ecstasy, envy, and even inspiration, he exclaimed:—“We-ell! Here’s education for you! In one word—science—light! But people of my sort are like owls in the sunlight in this world. . . . Ekh-ma! Your Well-Born! Come on, let’s finish that business!”

With a resolute gesture, he offered his hand to Petúnnikoff, and said in a suppressed way:

“Well . . . five hundred?”

“Not more than one hundred, Egór Teréntievitch,”—as though regretting that he could not give more. Petúnnikoff shrugged his shoulders, as he slapped his large, white hand into the hairy hand of the soldier.

They soon concluded the business, for the soldier suddenly advanced to meet Petúnnikoff’s wishes in great leaps, and the latter was immovably firm. And when Vavíloff had received one hundred rubles, and had signed the document, he flung the pen on the table, in exasperation, and exclaimed:

“Well, now it remains for me to deal with that golden horde! They’ll ridicule me, and put me to shame, the devils!”

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"Tell them that I have paid you the full sum mentioned in the suit,"—suggested Petúnnikoff, calmly emitting from his mouth slender streams of smoke and watching them.

"But will they believe that? They're clever scoundrels, also, just as bad as . . ." Vavíloff halted in time, disconcerted by the comparison which he had almost uttered, and glanced in alarm at the merchant's son. The latter smoked on, and was entirely absorbed in that occupation. He soon took his departure, after promising Vavíloff, as he said farewell, that he would destroy the nest of those restless people. Vavíloff looked after him, and sighed, feeling strongly inclined to shout something spiteful and insulting at the back of this man, who, with firm steps, was mounting the hill along the road filled with pits and obstructed with rubbish.

In the evening, the captain presented himself in the tavern. His brows were severely contracted, and his right hand was energetically clenched into a fist. Vavíloff smiled apologetically as he greeted him.

"We-ell, you worthy descendant of Cain and Judas, tell me . . ."

"We've come to a settlement . . ." said Vavíloff, sighing and lowering his eyes.

"I don't doubt it. How many rubles did you get?"

"Four hundred . . ."

"You're certainly lying. . . . But that's all the better for me. . . . Without further words, Egórka, pay me ten per cent for the discovery, four rubles to the teacher for writing your petition, a bucket of vódka to all of us, and a decent amount of luncheon. Hand over the money instantly, the vódka and the rest at eight o'clock."

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Vavíloff turned green, and stared at Kuválda with widely-opened eyes.

"That's nonsense! That's robbery! I won't give it. . . . What are you thinking of, Aristíd Fómitch! No, you'd better restrain your appetite until the next feast-day! What a man you are! No, now I'm in a position not to fear you. Now I'm . . ."

Kuválda looked at his watch.

"I'll give you, Egórka, ten minutes for your dirty conversation. Put an end to the wanderings of your tongue in that time, and give what I demand. If you don't give it—I'll eat you alive! Did The End sell you something? Did you read in the newspaper about the robbery at Básoff's? You understand? You won't succeed in hiding anything—we'll prevent that. And this very night. . . . Do you understand?"

"Aristíd Fómitch! What is this for?"—wailed the retired non-commissioned officer.

"No words! Do you understand or not?"

Tall, gray-haired Kuválda, with his brows impressively knit, spoke in an undertone, and his hoarse bass hummed ominously in the empty tavern. Vavíloff had always been a little afraid of him, both as a former military man and as a man who had nothing to lose. But now Kuválda presented himself in a new light to him: he did not talk much and hurriedly, as usual, and in what he did say in the tone of a commander, who is confident that he will be obeyed, there resounded a threat not uttered in jest. And Vavíloff felt that the captain would ruin him, if he chose, would ruin him with pleasure. He must yield to force. But, with a fierce trepidation in his heart, the soldier made one more effort to escape punishment. He heaved a deep sigh, and began submissively:

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"Evidently, the saying is true: 'The peasant woman beats herself if she doesn't reap clean . . . .' I told you a lie about myself, Aristíd Fómitch. . . . I wanted to appear cleverer than I am. . . . I received only one hundred rubles . . . ."

"Go on . . . ." Kuválda flung at him.

"And not four hundred, as I told you. . . . Which signifies . . . ."

"Which signifies nothing. I don't know when you were lying—a while ago, or now. I get sixty-five rubles from you. That's moderate. . . . Well? . . . ."

"Ekh, oh Lord my God! Aristíd Fómitch! I have always shown regard for Your Well-Born, as far as was in my power."

"Well? Drop your talk, Egórka, grandson of Judas!"

"Very well. . . . I'll give it. . . . Only, God will punish you for this."

"Hold your tongue, you rotten pimple on the face of the earth!"—bawled the captain, rolling his eyes ferociously.—"I am chastised by God. . . . He has placed me under the necessity of seeing you, of talking with you. . . . I'll mash you on the spot, like a fly!" He shook his fist under Vavíloff's nose, and gnashed his teeth, displaying them in a snarl.

When he went away, Vavíloff began to grin awry, and wink his eyes at frequent intervals. Then, down his cheeks trickled two big tears. They were of a grayish hue, and when they disappeared in his mustache, two others made their appearance to replace them. Then Vavíloff went off to his own room, took up his stand there in front of the holy pictures, and there he stood for a long time, without moving or wiping away the tears from his wrinkled, cinnamon-brown cheeks.

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Deacon Tarás, who was always drawn to the forests and fields, proposed to the men with pasts that they should go out on the plain, to a certain ravine, and there, in the lap of Nature, drink up Vavíloff's vódka. But the captain and all the others unanimously cursed the deacon and Nature, and decided to drink it at home, in their own courtyard.

"One, two, three . . ." counted Aristíd Fómitch,—  
"our sum total is thirteen; the teacher isn't here . . . well, and several jolly dogs will join us. We'll reckon it at twenty persons. At two cucumbers and a half per brother, and a pound of bread and meat apiece—it won't be so bad! We must have a bottle of vódka apiece . . . there's sour cabbage, and apples, and three watermelons. The question is, what the devil more do we need, my fellow-scoundrels? So we'll make ready to devour Egórka Vavíloff, for all this is his flesh and blood!"

They spread out the remains of some garments or other on the ground, on them laid out the viands and liquor, and seated themselves around them,—seated themselves sedately and in silence, with difficulty restraining their greedy desire to drink which beamed in their eyes.

Evening drew near, its shadows descended upon the ground in the courtyard of the lodging-house, disfigured with scraps, and the last rays of the sun lighted up the roof of the half-ruined edifice. It was cool and still.

"Let's start in, brothers!"—the captain gave the word of command.—"How many cups have we? Six . . . and there are thirteen of us. . . . Alexéi Máximo-vitch! Pour! Ready? Co-ome on, first platoon . . . fire!"

They drank, grunted, and began to eat.

"And the teacher isn't here . . . this is the third

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day that I haven't seen him. Has anybody seen him?"—inquired Kuválda.

"Nobody . . ."

"That's not like him! Well, no matter. Let's have another drink! . . . Let's drink to the health of Aristíd Kuválda, my only friend, who, all my life long, has never left me alone for a minute. Although, devil take him, I should have been the gainer if he had deprived me of his society for a while!"

"That's witty,"—said The Gnawed Bone, and coughed.

The captain, with a consciousness of his superiority, gazed at his comrade, but said nothing, for he was eating.

After taking two drinks, the company grew lively all of a sudden—the portions were inspiring. Tarás-and-a-Half expressed a desire to listen to a story, but the deacon had got into a dispute with The Peg-top about the advantages of thin women over fat ones, and paid no attention to the other man's words, but demonstrated his views to The Peg-top with the obduracy and heat of a man who is profoundly convinced of the justice of his views. The ingenuous face of The Meteor, who was lying on his stomach beside him, expressed emotion, as he relished the heady little words of the deacon. Martyánoff, clasping his knees with his huge hands, overgrown with black hair, stared silently and gloomily at a bottle of vódka, and fished for his mustache with his tongue, in the endeavor to bite it with his teeth. The Gnawed Bone was teasing Tyápa.

"I've already observed, you sorcerer, where you hide your money!"

"You're lucky . . ." said Tyápa hoarsely.

"I'm going to snatch it away . . ."

"Take it . . ."

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These people bored Kuválda: there was not among them a single companion worthy to listen to his eloquence and capable of comprehending him.

"Where can the teacher be?"—he meditated aloud. Martyánoff looked at him, and said:

"He'll come . . . ."

"I'm convinced that he'll come—but he won't drive up in a carriage. Future convict, let's drink to your future. If you murder a man with money, share it with me. . . . Then, my dear fellow, I'll go to America, to those . . . what's their name? Lampas? . . . Pampas! I'll go there, and I'll wind up as president of the states. Then I'll declare war on all Europe, and give it a sound drubbing. I'll buy an army . . . in Europe, also . . . I'll invite the French, the Germans, the Turks, and so forth, and with them I'll beat their own relatives . . . as Ilyá of Muróm beat the Tatár with a Tatár. . . . With money, one can be an Ilyá also . . . and annihilate Europe, and hire Judas Petúnnikoff as a lackey. . . . He'll do it . . . give him a hundred rubles a month, and he'll do it! But he'll make a bad lackey, for he'll begin to steal . . . ."

"And a thin woman is better than a fat one in this respect also, she comes cheaper,"—said the deacon argumentatively. "My first wife used to buy twelve arshíns for a dress, the second bought ten. . . . And so it was with the food, also . . . ."

Tarás-and-a-Half laughed apologetically, turned his head toward the deacon, fixed his eyes on the latter's face, and said, in confusion:

"I, also, had a wife . . . ."

"That may happen to anybody,"—remarked Kuválda.—  
"Continue your lies . . . ."

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"She was thin, but she ate a great deal. . . . And she even died of that . . . ."

"You poisoned her, cock-eye!"—said The Gnawed Bone, with conviction.

"No, by God I didn't! She overate herself on sturgeon,"—said Tarás-and-a-Half.

"And I tell you—that you poisoned her!"—reiterated The Gnawed Bone, decisively.

It often happened thus with him: when he had once uttered some piece of folly, he began to reiterate it, without quoting any grounds in confirmation, and though he talked, at first, in a capriciously-childish tone, he gradually worked up almost to a state of frenzy.

The deacon stood up for his friend.

"No, he is incapable of poisoning . . . there was no cause . . . ."

"And I say that he did poison her!"—squealed The Gnawed Bone.

"Hold your tongues!"—shouted the captain menacingly. His ill-humor had been converted into morose wrath. He stared at his friends with savage eyes, and not desecrating in their ugly physiognomies, already half-drunk, anything which could supply further food for his wrath, he hung his head on his breast, sat thus for a few minutes, and then lay down on the ground, face upward. The Meteor was nibbling at a cucumber. He had taken the cucumber into his hand, without looking at it, thrust it up to the middle in his mouth, and immediately began to chew it with his large, yellow teeth, so that the brine from the cucumber splattered in all directions, bedewing his cheeks. Evidently, he was not hungry, but this process of eating diverted him. Martyánoff sat motionless as a statue, in the same attitude in which he had seated himself on the



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ground, and he, also, was staring in a concentrated, gloomy way, at a six-quart bottle of vódka, which was already half empty. Tyápa was staring at the ground, and noisily chewing meat, which did not yield to his aged teeth. The Gnawed Bone lay on his stomach, and coughed, with his whole tiny body curled up in a ball. The rest—all taciturn, obscure figures—were sitting and lying in various attitudes, and all these men together, clad in their rags and the evening twilight, were hardly distinguishable from the heaps of rubbish scattered over the courtyard and overgrown with tall grass. Their ungainly attitudes and their rags made them resemble deformed animals, created by a rough, fantastic power, as a travesty on man.

“ There lived and dwelt in Súzdal town  
A gentlewoman of no account.  
And she was seized with a fit of cramps,  
Of mo-st unpleasant cramps ! ”

the deacon began to hum, in an undertone, as he embraced Alexéi Maxímovitch, smiling beatifically into the latter's face. Tarás-and-a-Half giggled voluptuously.

Night was at hand. In the sky, the stars were quietly kindling—up on the hill, in the town, the lights in the street-lamps. The mournful whistles of the steamers were wafted from the river, the door of Vavíloff's tavern opened with a creaking and crashing of glass. Two dark figures entered the courtyard, approached the group of men gathered round the bottle, and one of them asked, hoarsely:

“ Are you drinking? ”

And the other, in an undertone, with envy and joy, said:

“ Oh, what devils! ”

Then a hand was extended across the head of the deacon, and grasped the bottle, and the characteristic gurgling of

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vódka became audible, as it was poured from the bottle into a cup. Then there was a loud grunting noise . . .

"Well, this is melancholy!"—ejaculated the deacon.—  
"Cock-eye! Let's call to mind days of yore, let's sing 'By the rivers of Babylon!'"

"Does he know how?" inquired Símtzoff.

"He? He used to be a soloist in the Bishop's choir, my good fellow. . . . Come on, Cock-eye. . . . O-on-the-e-ri-i-iv-ers . . ."

The deacon's voice was wild, hoarse, cracked, and his friend sang in a squeaking falsetto.

Enveloped in the gloom, the empty house seemed to have increased in size, or to have moved its whole mass of half-decayed wood nearer to these men, who were awaking in it a dull echo by their wild singing. A cloud, magnificent and dark, was slowly floating across the sky above it. Some one of the men with pasts was snoring, the rest, still not sufficiently intoxicated, were either eating and drinking in silence, or chatting in an undertone, broken with prolonged pauses. None of them were accustomed to this dejected mood at a banquet, which was rare as to the abundance of vódka and of viands. For some reason or other, the boisterous animation characteristic of the lodging-house's inhabitants over a bottle did not flare up for a long time.

"You're . . . dogs! Stop your howling," said the captain to the singers, raising his head from the ground, and listening.—"Someone is driving in this direction . . . in a drozhky . . ."

A drozhky at that hour in Vyézhaya Street could not fail to arouse general attention. Who from the town would run the risk of driving over the ruts and pit-holes of the street—who was it, and why? All raised their heads and

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listened. In the nocturnal silence the rumbling of the wheels, as they came in contact with the splashers, was plainly audible. It grew nearer and nearer. A voice rang out, roughly inquiring:

“Well, where is it?”

Someone answered:

“It must be that house, yonder.”

“I won’t go any further . . .”

“They’re coming here!” exclaimed the captain.

“The police!” a tremulous murmur ran round.

“In a carriage! The fool!”—said Martyánoff in a dull tone.

Kuválda rose, and went to the gate.

The Gnawed Bone, stretching his head after him, began to listen.

“Is this the night lodging-house?” inquired someone, in a shaking voice.

“Yes, Aristíd Kuválda’s . . .” boomed the dissatisfied bass voice of the captain.

“There, there now . . . has Títoff the reporter been living here?”

“Aha! Have you brought him?”

“Yes . . .”

“Drunk?”

“Ill!”

“That means, that he’s very drunk. Hey there, teacher! get up!”

“Wait! I’ll help you . . . he’s very ill. He has been lying ill in my house for two days. Grasp him under the arm-pits. . . . The doctor has been. He’s in a very bad way . . .”

Tyápa rose, and slowly walked to the gate, but The Gnawed Bone grinned and took a drink.

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"Light up, there!" shouted the captain.

The Meteor went into the lodging-house and lighted the lamp. Then from the door of the house a broad streak of light streamed across the courtyard, and the captain, in company with a small man, led the teacher along it to the lodging-house. His head hung flabbily on his breast, his legs dragged along the ground, and his arms dangled in the air, as though they were broken. With the aid of Tyápa, they laid him in a heap on the sleeping-shelf, and he, trembling all over, stretched himself out on it, with a quiet groan.

"He and I have been working on the same newspaper. . . . He's very unfortunate. I said:—'Pray lie at my house, you will not incommode me . . . .' But he entreated me—'Take me home!' He got excited. . . . I thought that was injurious to him, and so I have brought him . . . home! He really belongs here, does he?"

"And, in your opinion, has he a home somewhere else?" asked Kuválda roughly, as he stared intently at his friend. "Tyápa, go and fetch some cold water!"

"So now . . ." hesitated the little man. . . . "I suppose . . . he does not need me?"

"You?"—and the captain examined him critically.

The little man was dressed in a sack-coat, much the worse for wear, and carefully buttoned clear up to the chin. There was fringe on the edges of his trousers, his hat was red with age and crumpled, as was also his gaunt, hungry face.

"No, he doesn't need you . . . there are a great many of your sort here . . ." said the captain, turning away from the little man.

"Farewell for the present, then!"—The little man went to the door, and from that spot he quietly asked:

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"If anything should happen . . . please give notice at the editorial office. . . . My name is Rýzhoff. I should like to write a brief obituary . . . for, after all, you know, he was a worker on the press . . ."

"Hm! An obituary, you say? Twenty lines—twenty kopéks? I'll do better: when he dies, I'll cut off one of his legs and send it to the editorial office, addressed to you. That will be more profitable to you than an obituary, it'll last you for two or three days . . . his legs are thick. . . . You've all been devouring him alive, surely you will eat him when he's dead . . . also, . . ."

The man gave a queer sort of snort, and vanished. The captain sat down on the sleeping-shelf beside the teacher, felt the latter's brow and breast with his hand, and called him by name:

"Philip!"

The dull sound re-echoed from the dirty walls of the night lodging-house, and died away.

"This is awkward, brother!"—said the captain, softly smoothing the dishevelled hair of the teacher with his hand. Then the captain listened to his breathing, which was hot and spasmodic, scrutinized his face, which was sunken and earthy in hue, sighed, and frowning harshly, glanced around. The lamp was a bad one: its flame flickered, and black shadows danced silently over the walls of the lodging-house. The captain began to stare stubbornly at their silent play, and to stroke his beard.

Tyápa arrived with a bucket of water, set it on the sleeping-shelf by the teacher's head, and, taking his hand, he raised it on his own hand, as though weighing it.

"The water is not needed," and the captain waved his hand.

"The priest is needed," announced the old rag-picker confidently.

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"Nothing is needed," decided the captain.

They fell silent, gazing at the teacher.

"Let's go and have a drink, you old devil!"

"And he?"

"Can you help him?"

Tyápa turned his back on the teacher, and both of them went out into the courtyard, to their company.

"What's going on there?"—inquired The Gnawed Bone, turning his sharp face to the captain.

"Nothing in particular. . . . The man is dying . . ." the captain curtly informed him.

"Have they been beating him?" asked The Gnawed Bone, with interest.

The captain made no reply, for he was drinking vódka at the moment.

"It seems as though he knew that we have something wherewith to hold a feast in commemoration of him," said The Gnawed Bone, as he lighted a cigarette.

Someone laughed, someone else sighed deeply. But, on the whole, the conversation between the captain and The Gnawed Bone did not produce upon these men any perceptible impression; at all events, it could not be seen that it had disturbed anyone, interested anyone, or set anyone to thinking. All of them had treated the teacher as though he were a remarkable man, but now many were already drunk, while others still remained calm outwardly. The deacon alone suddenly straightened himself up, made a noise with his lips, rubbed his forehead, and howled wildly:

"Whe-ere the just re-po-o-ose!" \*

"Here, you!"—hissed The Gnawed Bone,—“what's that you're roaring?"

"Give him a whack in his ugly face!"—counselled the captain.

\* A quotation from the Funeral and Requiem Services.—*Translator.*

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“Fool!” rang out Tyápa’s hoarse voice. “When a man is dying, one should hold his tongue . . . there should be quiet . . .”

It was quiet enough: both in heaven, which was covered with storm-clouds and threatened rain, and on earth, enveloped in the gloomy darkness of the autumnal night. From time to time the snores of those who had fallen asleep, the gurgling of the vódka as it was poured out, and munching were audible. The deacon kept muttering something. The storm-clouds floated low, as though they were on the point of striking the roof of the old house and overturning it on top of the group of men.

“Ah . . . one’s soul feels badly when a man whom he knows is dying,” remarked the captain, with a hiccough, and bowed his head upon his breast.

No one answered him.

“He was the best . . . among us . . . the cleverest, . . . the most decent. . . . I’m sorry for him . . .”

“Gi-i-ive re-est wi-i-ith the Sa-a-aints \* . . . sing, you cock-eyed rogue!”—blustered the deacon, punching the ribs of his friend who was slumbering by his side.

“Shut up! . . . you!”—exclaimed The Gnawed Bone in a whisper, as he sprang to his feet.

“I’ll hit him over the noddle,”—suggested Martyánoff, raising his head from the ground.

“Aren’t you asleep?”—said Aristíd Fómitch, with unusual amiability.—“Did you hear? The teacher’s here . . .”

Martyánoff fidgeted heavily about on the ground, rose, looked at the strip of light which proceeded from the door and windows of the lodging-house, waggled his head, and sat down in silence by the captain’s side.

\* From the Funeral and Requiem Services.—*Translator.*

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"Shall we take a drink?" suggested the latter.

Having found some glasses by the sense of feeling, they took a drink.

"I'll go and take a look . . ." said Tyápa; "perhaps he needs something . . ."

"He needs a coffin . . ." grinned the captain.

"Don't you talk about that," entreated The Gnawed Bone, in a low voice.

After Tyápa, The Meteor rose from the ground. The deacon, also, attempted to rise, but rolled over on his side, and swore loudly.

When Tyápa went away the captain slapped Martyánoff on the shoulder, and said in a low voice:

"So now, Martyánoff. . . . You ought to feel it more than the others. . . . You were . . . however, devil take it. Are you sorry for Philip?"

"No,"—replied the former jail-warden, after a pause. —"I don't feel anything of that sort, brother. . . . I've got out of the habit. . . . It's abominable to live so. I'm speaking seriously when I say that I'll murder somebody . . ."

"Yes?"—said the captain vaguely. "Well . . . what of that? Let's have another drink!"

"W-we are in-in-sig-ni-fi-cant fo-olks. I've had a drink—but I'll take ano-therrr!"

Símtzoff now awoke, and began to sing in a blissful voice.

"Brethren! Who's there? Pour out a cupful for the old man!"

They poured it and handed it to him. After drinking it, he again rolled over in a heap, knocking his head against someone's side.

The silence lasted for a couple of minutes—a silence as



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gloomy and painful as the autumnal night. Then someone whispered . . .

“What?” the question rang out.

“I say, that he was a splendid fellow. Such a quiet head . . .” they said in an undertone.

“And he had money, too, . . . and he didn’t spare it for the fellows . . .” and again silence reigned.

“He’s dying!” Tyápa’s shout resounded over the captain’s head.

Aristíd Fómitch rose, and moving his feet with forced steadiness, he went to the lodging-house.

“What are you going for?” Tyápa stopped him.—“Don’t go. For you’re drunk . . . and it isn’t a good thing . . .”

The captain halted and meditated.

“What is good on this earth? Go to the devil!” And he gave Tyápa a shove.

The shadows were still leaping along the walls of the night lodging-house, as though engaged in mute conflict with one another. On the sleeping-shelf, stretched out at full length, lay the teacher, rattling in the throat. His eyes were wide open, his bare chest heaved violently, froth was oozing from the corners of his mouth, and on his face there was a strained expression, as though he were making an effort to say something great, difficult—and was not able, and was suffering inexpressibly in consequence.

The captain stood in front of him, with his hands clasped behind his back, and stared at him for about a minute. Then he began to speak, painfully contracting his brows:

“Philip! Say something to me . . . throw a word of comfort to your friend! . . . I love you, brother. . . . All men are beasts, but you were for me—a man

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. . . although you were a drunkard. Akh, how you did drink vódka! Philip! It was exactly that which has ruined you. . . . And why? You ought to have known how to control yourself . . . and listen to me. D-didn't I use to tell you . . . ."

The mysterious, all-annihilating power called Death, as though insulted by the presence of this intoxicated man at the gloomy and solemn scene of its conflict with life, decided to make as speedy an end as possible of its business, and the teacher, heaving a deep sigh, moaned softly, shuddered, stretched himself out, and died.

The captain reeled on his legs, as he continued his speech.

"What's the matter with you? Do you want me to bring you some vódka? But better not drink it, Philip. . . . Restrain yourself, conquer yourself. . . . If you can't—drink! Why restrain yourself, to speak plainly. . . . For whose sake, Philip? Isn't that so? For whose sake? . . . ."

He grasped his foot, and drew him toward him.

"Ah, you are asleep, Philip? Well . . . sleep on. . . . A quiet night to you . . . to-morrow I'll explain it all to you, and you'll be convinced that it isn't necessary to deny yourself anything. . . . But now—sleep . . . if you are not dead . . . ."

He went out, accompanied by silence, and when he came to his men he announced:

"He's asleep . . . or dead . . . I don't know . . . I'm a l-lit-tle drunk . . . ."

Tyápa bent over still further, making the sign of the cross on his breast. Martyánoff writhed quietly, and lay down on the ground. The Meteor, that stupid lad, began to whimper, softly and plaintively, like an affronted woman.

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The Gnawed Bone began to wriggle swiftly over the ground, saying in a low, spiteful, and sorrowful tone:

“The devil take the whole lot of you! Tormentors. . . . Well, he’s dead! Come, what of that? I . . . why need I know that? Why must I be told about that? The time will come . . . when I shall die myself . . . just as much as he . . . I, as much as the rest.”

“That’s true!” said the captain loudly, dropping heavily to the ground.—“The time will come, and we shall all die, like the rest . . . ha-ha! How we pass our lives . . . is a trifling matter! But we shall die—like everybody. Therein lies the goal of life, believe my words. For a man lives in order that he may die. . . . And he dies. . . . And if that is so, what difference does it make why and how he dies, and how he has lived? Am I right, Martyánoff? Let’s have another drink . . . and another, as long as we are alive . . . .”

The rain began to fall. Dense, stifling gloom covered the forms of the men, as they wallowed on the earth, curled up in slumber or intoxication. The streak of light proceeding from the lodging-house paled, flickered, and suddenly vanished. Evidently, the wind had blown out the lamp or the kerosene in it had burned down. The rain-drops tapped timidly, irresolutely, as they fell upon the iron roof of the lodging-house. From the town, at the top of the hill, melancholy, occasional strokes of a bell were wafted—it was the churches being guarded.

The brazen sound, floating from the belfry, floated softly through the darkness, and slowly died away in it, but before the darkness could engulf its last, tremulously-sobbing note, another stroke began, and again, through the silence

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of the night, the melancholy sigh of the metal was borne forth.

Tyápa was the first to awaken in the morning.

Turning over on his back, he stared at the sky—only in this posture did his deformed neck permit him to see the heaven overhead.

On that morning the sky was uniformly gray. There, on high, the dark, cold gloom had thickened, it had extinguished the sun, and covering the blue infinity, poured forth melancholy upon the earth. Tyápa crossed himself, and raised himself on his elbow, in order to see whether any of the vódka anywhere remained. The bottle was there, but it was empty. Crawling across his comrades, Tyápa began to inspect the cups from which they had drunk. He found one of them almost full, drank it down, wiped his lips with his sleeve, and began to shake the captain by the shoulder.

“Get up . . . hey there! Do you hear?”

The captain raised his head, gazing at him with dim eyes.

“We must inform the police . . . come, then, get up!”

“What’s the matter?”—asked the captain, sleepily and angrily.

“The matter is, that he’s dead . . .”

“Who’s dead?”

“The learned man . . .”

“Philip? Ye-es!”

“And you’ve forgotten—ekhma!”—grunted Tyápa reproachfully.

The captain rose to his feet, yawned with a whizzing noise, and stretched himself so hard that his bones creaked.

“Then, you go and report . . .”

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"I won't go . . . I don't like them,"—said Tyápa in a surly tone.

"Well, then, wake up the deacon yonder. . . . And I'll go and see about things . . ."

"All right . . . get up, deacon!"

The captain went into the lodging-house, and stood at the teacher's feet. The dead man was lying stretched out at full length: his left hand was on his breast, his right was flung back in such a manner as though he had been flourishing it preparatory to dealing someone a blow. The captain reflected, that if the teacher were to rise now, he would be as tall as Tarás-and-a-Half. Then he seated himself on the sleeping-shelf, at the feet of his friend, and calling to mind that they had lived together for three years, he sighed. Tyápa entered, holding his head, as a goat does, when he is about to butt. He sat down on the other side of the teacher's feet, gazed at the latter's dark, calm, serious face, with its tightly closed eyes, and said hoarsely:

"Yes . . . there he is dead. . . . And I shall die soon . . ."

"It's time you did,"—said the captain morosely.

"It is time!"—assented Tyápa.—"And you must die also. . . . Anyhow, it's better than . . ."

"Perhaps it's worse? How do you know?"

"It can't be worse. You'll die, you'll have to deal with God. . . . But with the people here. . . . But what do people signify?"

"Well, all right, don't rattle in your throat like that . . ." Kuválda angrily interrupted him.

And in the gloom which filled the night lodging-house an impressive silence reigned.

For a long time they sat there in silence, at the feet of

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their dead comrade, and glanced at him, now and then, both absorbed in thought. Then Tyápa inquired:

"Shall you bury him?"

"I? No! Let the police bury him."

"Well! You'd better bury him, I think . . . you know, you took his money from Vavíloff for writing that petition. . . . I'll contribute, if there isn't enough . . ."

"I have his money . . . but I won't bury him."

"That's not well. You're robbing a corpse. I'll just tell everybody that you want to devour his money . . ."

menaced Tyápa.

"You're stupid, you old devil!"—said Kuválda scornfully.

"I'm not stupid. . . . Only, that isn't good, I say, not a friendly thing to do."

"Well, it's all right, anyway. Get away with you!"

"You don't say so! And how much money is there?"

"Four rubles . . ." said Kuválda abstractedly.

"There, now! You might give me five rubles . . ."

"What a rascally old fellow you are . . ." and the captain swore at Tyápa, looking him indifferently in the face.

"What of that? Really, now, give it . . ."

"Go to the devil! . . . I'm going to build him a monument with the money."

"What's the good of that to him?"

"I'll buy a mill-stone and an anchor. I'll put the mill-stone on the grave, and I'll fasten the anchor to it with a chain. . . . It will be very heavy . . ."

"What for? You're getting whimsical . . ."

"Well . . . it's no business of yours."

"I'll tell, see if I don't . . ." threatened Tyápa again.

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Aristíd Fómitch gazed dully at him and made no reply. And again, for a long time, they sat in silence, which always assumes an impressive and mysterious coloring in the presence of the dead.

"Hark, there . . . somebody's driving up!"—said Tyápa, as he rose, and left the lodging-house.

The police captain of the district, the coroner, and the doctor soon made their appearance at the door. All three, one after the other, approached the teacher, and after taking a look at him went out, rewarding Kuválda with sidelong and suspicious glances. He sat there, paying no attention to them, until the police captain asked him, nodding toward the teacher:

"What did he die of?"

"Ask him . . . I think, from lack of practice . . ."

"What's that you say?"—inquired the police captain.

"I say—he died, in my opinion, from lack of practice, because he wasn't used to the illness that seized upon him . . ."

"Hm . . . yes! And was he ill long?"

"We might drag him out here, we can't see anything in there," suggested the doctor, in a bored tone.—"Perhaps there are traces . . ."

"Here, you, there, call someone to carry him out,"—the police captain ordered Kuválda.

"Call them yourself. . . . He doesn't bother me where he is . . ."

retorted Kuválda indifferently.

"Get along, there!"—shouted the policeman, with a savage face.

"Whoa!" parried Kuválda, not stirring from the spot and calmly disclosing his teeth in a vicious snarl.

"I'll give it to you, devil take you!"—shouted the police

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captain, enraged to such a degree that his face became suffused with blood.—“I won’t overlook this! I . . .”

“A very good-morning, honored sirs!”—said merchant Petúnnikoff, in a sweet voice, as he made his appearance in the doorway.

Taking them all in with one sharp glance, he shuddered, retreated a pace, and removing his cap, began to cross himself vehemently. Then a smile of malevolent triumph flitted across his countenance, and staring point-blank at Kuválda he inquired respectfully:

“What’s this here?—Can they have murdered the man?”

“Why, something of that sort,” the coroner replied.

Petúnnikoff heaved a deep sigh, then crossed himself again, and said, in a tone of distress:

“Ah, Lord my God! This is just what I was afraid of! Every time I dropped in here to take a look . . . áï, áï, áï! And when I got home, I kept having such visions—God preserve everyone from such an experience!—Many a time I have felt like turning that gentleman yonder . . . the commander-in-chief of the golden horde, out of his quarters, but I was always afraid to . . . you know . . . it’s better to yield to that sort of people . . . I said to myself, . . . otherwise . . .”

He made an easy gesture with his hand in the air, then drew it across his face, gathered his beard in his fist, and sighed again.

“Dangerous people. And that gentleman there is a sort of commander over them . . . a regular bandit chieftain.”

“And we’re going to examine him,” said the police captain in an extremely significant tone, as he gazed at the cavalry captain with revengeful eyes. “He is well known to me! . . .”



## Men with Pasts

"Yes, brother, you and I are old acquaintances . . . ." assented Kuválda, in a familiar tone.—"What a lot of bribes I've paid to you and to your sprouts of under-officials to hold your tongues!"

"Gentlemen!"—cried the police captain,—"you hear him? I request that you will bear this in mind! I won't overlook this. . . . Ah . . . ah! So that's it? Well, I'll give you cause to remember me! I'll . . . put an end to you, my friend!"

"Don't brag when you set out for the wars . . . my friend,"—said Aristíd Fómitch coolly.

The doctor, a young man in spectacles, stared at him with curiosity, the coroner with ominous attention, Petúnnikoff with triumph, but the police captain shouted and dashed about, as he flung himself on him.

The sinister form of Martyánoff made its appearance in the doorway of the lodging-house. He stepped up quietly and stood behind Petúnnikoff, so that his chin was just over the merchant's crown. On one side, from behind him, peered the deacon, his small, swollen, red eyes opened to their fullest extent.

"Come on, let's do something, gentlemen," suggested the doctor.

Martyánoff made a terrible grimace, and suddenly sneezed straight on Petúnnikoff's head. The latter shrieked, squatted down, and sprang to one side, almost knocking the police captain off his feet, as the latter supported him, having opened his arms wide to receive him.

"You see?"—said the merchant, pointing at Martyánoff. "That's the sort of people they are! Hey?"

Kuválda broke out into a roar of laughter. The doctor and the coroner laughed, and new forms kept constantly approaching the door of the night lodging-house. The

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half-awake, bloated physiognomies, with red, swollen eyes, with dishevelled heads, unceremoniously scrutinized the doctor, the coroner, and the police captain.

"Where are you crawling to!"—the policeman exhorted them, tugging at their rags and pushing them away from the door. But he was one, and they were many, and paying no heed to him, silent and threatening they continued to advance, exhaling an odor of stale vódka. Kuválda looked at them, then at the authorities, who were somewhat disconcerted by the size of this ugly audience, and, with a grin, he remarked to the authorities:

"Gentlemen! Perhaps you would like to make the acquaintance of my lodgers and friends? You would? Never mind . . . sooner or later, you'll be forced to make acquaintance with them, in the discharge of your duties . . ."

The doctor laughed in an embarrassed way. The coroner pressed his lips tightly together, and the police captain saw what it was necessary to do, and shouted outside:

"Sidoroff! Whistle . . . when the men arrive, tell them to get a cart . . ."

"Well, I must be going!"—said Petúnnikoff, moving forward from somewhere in the corner.—"You will vacate my quarters to-day, sir. . . . I'm going to have this old shanty torn down. . . . Look out, or I'll apply to the police . . ."

The shrill whistle of the policeman rang out in the courtyard. At the door of the night lodging-house its denizens stood in a dense mass, yawning and scratching their heads.

"So, you don't want to make acquaintance? . . . That's impolite! . . ." laughed Aristíd Kuválda.

Petúnnikoff took his purse out of his pocket, fumbled in

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it, pulled out two five-kopék pieces, and, crossing himself, laid them at the feet of the corpse.

“Bless, oh Lord . . . for the burial of the sinner’s dust . . .”

“Wha-at!” bawled the cavalry captain.—“You? For his burial? Take it away! Take it away, I tell you . . . you scou-oundrel! You dare to contribute your stolen pennies to the burial of an honest man. . . . I’ll tear you to bits!”

“Your Well-Born!” shouted the merchant in alarm, seizing the police captain by the elbow. The doctor and the coroner rushed out, the police captain shouted loudly:

“Sídoroff, come here!”

The men with pasts formed a wall across the door, and with interest lighting up their rumpled faces they watched and listened.

Kuválda shook his fist over Petúnnikoff’s head, and roared, rolling his blood-shot eyes ferociously.

“Scoundrel and thief! Take your money! You dirty creature . . . take it, I say . . . if you don’t, I’ll ram those five-kopék pieces into your eyeballs—take it!”

Petúnnikoff stretched out a trembling hand toward his mite, and fending off Kuválda’s fist with the other hand, he said:

“Bear witness, Mr. Police Captain, and you, my good people.”

“We’re bad people, merchant,” rang out The Gnawed Bone’s trembling voice.

The police captain, puffing out his face like a bladder, whistled desperately, and held his other hand in the air over the head of Petúnnikoff, who was wriggling about in

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front of him exactly as though he were about to jump upon his body.

"If you like, I'll make you kiss the feet of this corpse, you base viper? D-do you want to?"

And grasping Petúnnikoff by the collar, Kuválda hurled him to the door, as though he had been a kitten.

The men with pasts hastily stepped aside, to make room for Petúnnikoff to fall. And he sprawled at their feet, howling in rage and terror:

"Murder! Police . . . I'm killed!"

Martyánoff slowly raised his foot, and took aim with it at the merchant's head. The Gnawed Bone, with a voluptuous expression on his countenance, spat in Petúnnikoff's face. The merchant contracted himself into a small ball, and rolled, on all fours, into the courtyard, encouraged by a roar of laughter. But two policemen had already made their appearance in the courtyard, and the police captain, pointing at Kuválda, shouted triumphantly:

"Arrest him! Bind him!"

"Bind him, my dear men!"—entreated Petúnnikoff.

"Don't you dare! I won't run away . . . I'll go of myself, wherever it's necessary . . . ." said Kuválda, waving aside the policemen, who had run up to him.

The men with pasts vanished, one by one. A cart drove into the courtyard. Several dejected tatterdemalions had already carried the teacher out of the lodging-house.

"I'll g-give it to you, my dear fellow . . . just wait!"—the police captain menaced Kuválda.

"Well, you bandit chief!"—inquired Petúnnikoff venomously, excited and happy at the sight of his enemy, whose hands had been bound.

"Lead him off!" said the police captain, pointing at the cavalry captain.

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Kuválda, making no protest, silent and with knitted brows, moved from the yard, and as he passed the teacher he bowed his head, but did not look at him. Martyánoff, with his stony face, followed him. Merchant Petúnnikoff's courtyard was speedily emptied.

"Go on, now!" and the cab-driver shook his reins over his horse's crupper.

The cart moved off, jolting over the uneven ground of the courtyard. The teacher, covered with some rag or other, lay stretched out in it, face upward, and his belly quivered. It seemed as though the teacher were laughing, in a quiet, satisfied way, delighted that, at last, he was to leave the night lodging-house, never to return there again. . . . Petúnnikoff, as he accompanied him with a glance, crossed himself piously, and then began with his cap to beat off the dust and rubbish which had clung to his clothing. And, in proportion as the dust disappeared from his coat, a calm expression of satisfaction with himself and confidence in himself made its appearance on his countenance. From the courtyard he could see Aristíd Fómitch Kuválda walking along the street, up the hill, with his hands bound behind him, tall, gray-haired, in a cap with a red band, which resembled a streak of blood.

Petúnnikoff smiled the smile of the conqueror, and went into the night lodging-house, but suddenly halted, shuddering. In the door, facing him, with a stick in his hand and a huge sack on his shoulder, stood a terrible old man, bristling like a hedgehog with the rags which covered his long body, bent beneath the weight of his burden, and with his head bowed upon his breast exactly as though he were about to hurl himself at the merchant.

"What do you want?" shouted Petúnnikoff.—"Who are you?"

## Men with Pasts

"A man . . ." rang out a dull, hoarse voice.

This hoarse rattle rejoiced and reassured Petúnnikoff. He even smiled.

"A man! Akh, you queer fellow . . . do such men exist?"

And stepping aside, he let the old man pass him, as the latter marched straight at him, and muttered dully:

"There are various sorts of men . . . as God wills. . . . There are worse men than I . . . worse than I . . . yes!"

The overcast sky gazed silently into the dirty courtyard, and at the clean man, with the small, pointed, gray beard, who was walking over the ground, measuring something with his footsteps and with his sharp little eyes. On the roof of the old house a crow sat and croaked triumphantly, as it stretched out its neck, and rocked to and fro.

In the stern, gray storm-clouds, which thickly covered the sky, there was something strained and implacable, as though they, in preparing to discharge a downpour of rain, were firmly resolved to wash away all the filth from this unhappy, tortured, melancholy earth.



# **THE INSOLENT MAN**





## THE INSOLENT MAN

THE irritated, angry editor was running to and fro in the large, light editorial office of the "N—— Gazette," crumpling in his hand a copy of the publication, spasmodically shouting and swearing. It was a tiny figure, with a sharp, thin face, decorated with a little beard and gold eyeglasses. Stamping loudly with his thin legs, encased in gray trousers, he fairly whirled about the long table, which stood in the middle of the room, and was loaded down with crumpled newspapers, galley-proofs, and fragments of manuscript. At the table, with one hand resting upon it, while with the other he wiped his brow, stood the publisher—a tall, stout, fair-haired man, of middle age, and with a faint grin on his white, well-fed face, he watched the editor with merry, brilliant eyes. The maker-up, an angular man, with a yellow face and a sunken chest, in a light-brown coat, which was very dirty and far too long for him, was shrinking closely against the wall. He raised his brows, and gazed at the ceiling with staring eyes, as though trying to recall something, or in meditation, but a moment later, wrinkled up his nose in a disenchanted way, and dropped his head dejectedly on his breast. In the doorway stood the form of the office boy; men with anxious, dissatisfied countenances kept entering and disappearing, jostling him on their way. The voice of the editor, cross, irritated, and ringing, sometimes rose to a squeal, and made the publisher frown and the maker-up shudder in affright.

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"No . . . this is such a rascally piece of business! I'll start a criminal suit against this scoundrel. . . . Has the proof-reader arrived? Devil take it,—I ask—has the proof-reader arrived? Call all the compositors here! Have you told them? No, just imagine, what will happen now! All the newspapers will take it up. . . . Disgrrrrace! All Russia will hear of it. . . . I won't let that scoundrel off!"

And raising his hands which held the newspaper to his head, the editor stood rooted to the spot, as though endeavoring to wrap his head in the paper, and thus protect it from the anticipated disgrace.

"Find him first, . . ." advised the publisher, with a dry laugh.

"I'll f-find him, sir! I'll f-find him!"—the editor's eyes blazed, and starting on his gallop once more, and pressing the newspaper to his breast, he began to tousle it fiercely.—"I'll find him, and I'll roast him. . . . And where's that proof-reader? . . . Aha! . . . Here. . . . Now, sir, I beg that you will favor me with your company, my dear sirs! Hm! . . . 'The peaceful commanders of the leaden armies . . .' ha, ha! Pass in . . . there, that's it!"

One after another the compositors entered the room. They already knew what the trouble was, and each one of them had prepared himself to play the part of the culprit, in view of which fact, they all unanimously expressed in their grimy faces, impregnated with lead dust, complete immobility and a sort of wooden composure. They huddled together, in the corner of the room, in a dense group. The editor halted in front of them, with his hands, clutching the newspaper, thrown behind his back. He was shorter in stature than they, and he was obliged to hold

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back his head, in order to look them in the face. He made this movement too quickly, and his spectacles flew up on his forehead; thinking that they were about to fall, he flung his hand into the air to catch them, but, at that moment, they fell back again on the bridge of his nose.

"Devil take you . . ." he gritted his teeth.

Happy smiles beamed on the grimy countenances of the compositors. Someone uttered a suppressed laugh.

"I have not summoned you hither that you may show your teeth at me!"—shouted the editor viciously, turning livid.—"I should think you had disgraced the newspaper enough already. . . . If there be an honest man among you, who understands what a newspaper is, what the press is, let him tell who was the author of this. . . . In the leading article . . ." The editor began nervously to unfold the paper.

"But what's it all about?" said a voice, in which nothing but simple curiosity was audible.

"Ah! You don't know? Well, then . . . here . . . 'Our factory legislation has always served the press as a subject for hot discussion . . . that is to say, for the talking of stupid trash and nonsense! . . . ? There, now! Are you satisfied? Will the man who added that 'talking' be pleased . . . and, particularly—the word 'talking'! how grammatical and witty!—well, sirs, which of you is the author of that 'stupid trash and nonsense'?"

"Whose article is it? Yours? Well, and you are the author of all the nonsense that is said in it,"—rang out the same calm voice which had previously put the question to the editor.

This was insolent, and all involuntarily assumed that the person who was to blame for the affair had been found.

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A movement took place in the hall: the publisher drew nearer to the group, the editor raised himself on tiptoe, in the endeavor to see over the heads of the composers into the face of the speaker. The composers separated. Before the editor stood a stoutly-built young fellow, in a blue blouse, with a pock-marked face, and curling locks of hair which stood up in a crest above his left temple. He stood with his hands thrust deeply into the pockets of his trousers, and, indifferently riveting his gray, mischievous eyes on the editor, he smiled faintly from out of his curling, light-brown beard. Everybody looked at him:—the publisher, with brows contracted in a scowl, the editor with amazement and wrath, the maker-up with a suppressed smile. The faces of the composers expressed both badly-concealed satisfaction and alarm and curiosity.

“So . . . it’s you?”—inquired the editor, at last, pointing at the pock-marked compositor with his finger and compressing his lips in a highly significant manner.

“Yes . . . it’s I . . .” replied the latter, grinning in a particularly simple and offensive manner.

“A-ah! . . . Very glad to know it! So it’s you? Why did you put it in, permit me to inquire?”

“But have I said that I did put it in?”—and the compositor glanced at his comrades.

“It certainly was he, Mítry \* Pávlovitch,” the maker-up remarked to the editor.

“Well, if I did, I did,”—assented the compositor, not without a certain good-nature, and waving his hand he smiled again.

Again all remained silent. No one had expected so prompt and calm a confession, and it acted upon them all as a surprise. Even the editor’s wrath was converted, for a

\* *Mítry*—colloquial abbreviation of *Dmítry*.—*Translator*.

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moment, into amazement. The space around the pock-marked man grew wider, the maker-up went off quickly to the table, the compositors stepped aside . . .

"Then you did it deliberately, intentionally?" inquired the publisher, smiling, and staring at the pock-marked man with eyes round with astonishment.

"Be so good as to answer!"—shouted the editor, flourishing the crumpled newspaper.

"Don't shout . . . I'm not afraid. A great many people have yelled at me, and all without any cause! . . ." and in the compositor's eyes sparkled a daring, impudent light. . . . "Exactly so . . ." he went on, shifting from foot to foot, and now addressing the publisher,—“I put in the words deliberately . . .”

"You hear?"—the editor appealed to the audience.

"Well, as a matter of fact, what did you mean by it, you devil's doll!"—the publisher suddenly flared up.—“Do you understand how much harm you have done me?”

"It's nothing to you. . . . I think it must even have increased the retail sales. But here's the editor . . . really, that bit didn't exactly suit his taste."

The editor was fairly petrified with indignation; he stood in front of that cool, malicious man, and flashed his eyes in silence, finding no words wherewith to express his agitated feelings.

"Well, it will be the worse for you, brother, on account of this!"—drawled the publisher malevolently, and, suddenly softening, he slapped his knee with his hand.

In reality, he was pleased with what had happened, and with the workman's insolent reply: the editor had always treated him rather patronizingly, making no effort to conceal his consciousness of his own mental superiority, and

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now he, that same conceited, self-confident man, was thrown prostrate in the dust . . . and by whom?

“ I’ll pay you off for your insolence to me, my dear soul! ” he added.

“ Why, you certainly won’t overlook it so! ” assented the compositor.

This tone and these words again produced a sensation. The compositors exchanged glances with one another, the maker-up elevated his eyebrows, and seemed to shrivel up, the editor retreated to the table, and supporting himself on it with his hands, more disconcerted and offended than angry, he stared intently at his foe.

“ What’s your name? ” inquired the publisher, taking his notebook from his pocket.

“ Nikólka \* Gvózdeff, Vasíly Ivánovitch! ” the maker-up promptly stated.

“ And you, you lackey of Judas the Traitor, hold your tongue when you’re not spoken to,”—said the compositor, with a surly glance at the maker-up.—“ I have a tongue of my own, . . . I answer for myself. . . . My name is Nikolái Semyónovitch Gvózdeff. My residence . . . ”

“ We’ll find that out! ”—promised the publisher.—“ And now, take yourself off to the devil! Get out, all of you! . . . ”

With a heavy shuffling of feet, the compositors departed. Gvózdeff followed them.

“ Stop . . . if you please . . . ” said the editor softly, but distinctly, and stretched out his hand after Gvózdeff.

Gvózdeff turned toward him, with an indolent movement leaned against the door-jamb, and, as he twisted his beard, he riveted his insolent eyes upon the editor’s face.

\* Colloquial for Nikolái.—*Translator*.

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"I want to ask you about something,"—began the editor. He tried to maintain his composure, but this he did not succeed in doing: his voice broke, and rose to a shriek. —"You have confessed . . . that in creating this scandal . . . you had me in view. Yes? What is the meaning of that? revenge on me? I ask you—what did you do it for? Do you understand me? Can you answer me?"

Gvózdeff twitched his shoulders, curled his lips, and dropping his head, remained silent for a minute. The publisher tapped his foot impatiently, the maker-up stretched his neck forward, and the editor bit his lips, and nervously cracked his fingers. All waited.

"I'll tell you, if you like. . . . Only, as I'm an uneducated man, perhaps it won't be intelligible to you . . . Well, in that case, pray excuse me! . . . Now, here's the way the matter stands. You write various articles, and inculcate on everybody philanthropy and all that sort of thing. . . . I can't tell you all this in detail—I'm not much of a hand at reading and writing. . . . I think you know yourself, what you discourse about every day. . . . Well, and so I read your articles. You make comments on us workingmen . . . and I read it all. . . . And it disgusts me to read it, for it's nothing but nonsense. Mere shameless words, Mítry Pávlovitch! . . . because you write—don't steal, but what goes on in your own printing-office? Last week, Kiryákoff worked three days and a half, earned three rubles and eighty kopéks \* and fell ill. His wife comes to the counting-room for the money, but the manager tells her, that he won't give it to her, and that she owes one ruble and twenty kopéks in fines. Now talk about not stealing!

\* About \$1.90.—*Translator.*



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Why don't you write about these ways of doing things? And about how the manager yells, and thrashes the poor little boys for every trifle? . . . You can't write about that, because you pursue the same policy yourself. . . . You write that life in the world is hard for folks—and I'll just tell you, that the reason you write all that, is because you don't know how to do anything else. That's the whole truth of the matter. . . . And that's why you don't see any of the brutal things that go on right under your nose, but you narrate very well about the brutalities of the Turks. So aren't they nonsense—those articles of yours? I've been wanting this long time to put some words into your articles, just to shame you. And it oughtn't to be needed again!"

Gvózdeff felt himself a hero. He puffed out his chest proudly, held his head very high, and without attempting to conceal his triumph, he looked the editor straight in the face. But the editor shrank close against the table, clutched it with his hands, flung himself back, paling and flushing by turns, and smiling persistently in a scornful, confused, vicious, and suffering manner. His widely-opened eyes winked fast.

"A socialist?"—inquired the publisher, with apprehension and interest, in a low voice, addressing the editor. The latter smiled a sickly smile, but made no reply, and hung his head.

The maker-up went off to the window, where stood a tub in which grew a huge filodendron, that cast upon the floor a pattern of shade, took up his post behind the tub, and thence watched them all, with eyes which were as small, black, and shifty as those of a mouse. They expressed a certain impatient expectation, and now and then a little flash of joy lighted them up. The publisher stared

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at the editor. The latter was conscious of this, raised his head, and with an uneasy gleam in his eyes, and a nervous quiver in his face, he shouted after the departing Gvózdeff:

“Stop . . . if you please! You have insulted me. But you are not in the right—I hope you feel that? I am grateful to you for . . . y-your . . . straightforwardness, with which you have spoken out, but, I repeat . . .”

He tried to speak ironically, but instead of irony, something wan and false rang in his words, and he paused, in order to tune himself up to a defence which should be worthy of himself and of this judge, as to whose right to sit in judgment upon him, the editor, he had never before entertained a thought.

“Of course!”—and Gvózdeff nodded his head.—“The only one who is right is the one who can say a great deal.”

And, as he stood in the doorway, he cast a glance around him, with an expression on his face which plainly showed how impatient he was to get away from there.

“No, excuse me!”—cried the editor, elevating his tone, and raising his hand.—“You have brought forward an accusation against me, but before that, you arbitrarily punished me for what you regard as a fault toward you on my part. . . . I have a right to defend myself, and I request that you will listen to me.”

“But what business have you with me? Defend yourself to the publisher, if necessary. But what have you to say to me? If I have insulted you, drag me before the justice of the peace. But—defend yourself—that’s another matter! Good-bye!”—He turned sharply about, and putting his hands behind his back, he left the room.

He had on his feet heavy boots with large heels, with

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which he tramped noisily, and his footsteps echoed resoundingly in the vast, shed-like editorial room.

"There you have history and geography—a detailed statement of the case!"—exclaimed the publisher, when Gvózdeff had slammed the door behind him.

"Vasíly Ivánovitch, I am not to blame in this matter . . ." began the maker-up, throwing his hands apart apologetically, as he approached the publisher with short, cautious steps. "I make up the pages, and I can't possibly tell what the man on duty has put into them. I'm on my feet all night. . . . I'm here, while my wife lies ill at home, and my children . . . three of them . . . have no one to look after them. . . . I may say that I sell my blood, drop by drop, for thirty rubles a month. . . . And when Gvózdeff was hired, I said to Feódor Pávlovitch: 'Feódor Pávlovitch,' says I, 'I've known Nikólka ever since he was a little boy, and I'm bound to tell you, that Nikólka is an insolent fellow and a thief, a man without conscience. He has already been tried in the district court,' says I, 'and has even been in prison . . .'"

"What was he in prison for?"—inquired the editor thoughtfully, without looking at the narrator.

"For pigeons, sir . . . that is to say, not because of the pigeons, but for smashing locks. He smashed the locks of seven dove-cotes in one night, sir! . . . and set all the flocks at liberty—scattered all the birds, sir! A pair of dark-gray ones belonging to me disappeared also,—one fancy tumbler, and a pouter. They were very valuable birds."

"Did he steal them?"—inquired the publisher with curiosity.

"No, he doesn't pamper himself in that way. He was

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tried for theft, but he was acquitted. So he's—an insolent fellow. . . . He released the birds, and delighted in it, and jeered at us fanciers. . . . He has been thrashed more than once already. Once he even had to go to the hospital after the thrashing. . . . And when he came out, he bred devils in my gossip's stove.”\*

“Devils!” said the publisher in amazement.

“What twaddle!”—the editor shrugged his shoulders, knit his brows, and again biting his lips, he relapsed into thought.

“It's perfectly true, only I didn't say it just right,”—said the maker-up abashed.—“You see, he, Nikólka, is a stove-builder. He's a jack-of-all-trades: he understands the lithographic trade, he has been an engraver, and a plumber, also. . . . Well, then, my gossip—she has a house of her own, and belongs to the ecclesiastical class—and she hired him to rebuild her stove. Well, he rebuilt it all right; only, the rascally fellow, he cemented into the wall a bottle filled with quicksilver and needles . . . and he put something else in, too. This produced a sound—such a peculiar sound, you know, like a groan and a sigh; and then folks began to say that devils had bred in the house. When they heated the stove, the quicksilver in the bottle warmed up, and began to roam about in it. And the needles scratched against the glass, just as though somebody were gnashing his teeth. Besides the needles, he had put various iron objects into the bottle, and they made noises, too, after their own fashion,—the

\* The word means “fellow sponsor” or intimate friend—the precise sense does not always appear from the context. But it is worth noting that a man and a woman who stand sponsors for a child in baptism, in the Eastern Catholic Church, thereby place themselves within the forbidden degrees of relationship, and can never marry each other.

—*Translator.*

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needle after its fashion, the nail after its fashion, and the result was a regular devil's music. . . . My gossip even tried to sell her house, but nobody would buy it—who likes to have devils round, sir? She had three prayer-services with blessing of holy water celebrated—it did no good. The woman bawled; she had a daughter of marriageable age, a hundred head of fowl, two cows, and a good farm . . . and these devils must needs spoil everything! She struggled and struggled, so that it was pitiful to see. But I must say that Nikólka rescued her. ‘Give me fifty rubles,’ says he, ‘and I’ll drive out the devils!’ She gave him four to start with,—and afterward, when he had pulled out the bottle, and confessed what the matter was—well, good-bye! She’s a very clever woman, and she wanted to hand him over to the police, but he persuaded her not to. . . . And he has a lot of other artful dodges.”

“And for one of those charming ‘artful dodges’ yesterday I shall have to pay. I!”—ejaculated the editor nervously, and tearing himself from his place, he again began to fling himself about the room.—“Oh my God! How stupid, how coarse, how trivial it all is . . .”

“We-ell, you’re making a great fuss over it!”—said the publisher soothingly.—“Make a correction, explain how it happened. . . . He’s a very interesting young fellow, deuce take him! He put devils in the stove, ha, ha! No, by heaven! We’ll teach him a lesson, but he’s a rascal with a brain, and he arouses for himself some feeling of . . . you know!”—the publisher snapped his fingers over his head, and cast a glance at the ceiling.

“Does it interest you?”—cried the editor sharply.

“Well, why not? Isn’t it amusing? And he described you pretty thoroughly. He’s got wit, the beast!”—the

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publisher said, taking revenge on the editor for his shout.—“How do you intend to pay him off?”

The editor suddenly ran close up to the publisher.

“I shall not pay him off, sir! I can’t, Vasíly Ivánovitch, because that manufacturer of devils is in the right! The devil knows what goes on in your printing-office, do you hear? But we! . . . but I have to play the fool, thanks to you. He’s in the right, a thousand times over!”

“And also in the addition which he made to your article?”—inquired the publisher venomously, and pursed up his lips ironically.

“Well, and what if he was? And he was right, in that also, yes! You must understand, Vasíly Ivánovitch, for, you know, we’re a liberal newspaper . . .”

“And we print an edition of two thousand, reckoning in those gratuitously distributed and the exchanges,”—dryly interposed the publisher.—“But our competitor disposes of nine thousand!”

“We-ell, sir?”

“I have nothing more to say!”

The editor waved his hand hopelessly, and again, with dimming eyes, he began to pace up and down the room.

“A charming situation!”—he muttered, shrugging his shoulders.—“A sort of universal chase! All the dogs hunting down one, and that one muzzled! Ha, ha! And that unfortunate w-workman! Oh my God!”

“Why, spit on the whole business, my dear fellow, don’t get worked up over it!”—counselled Vasíly Ivánovitch suddenly, with a good-natured grin, as though tired out with emotions and recriminations.—“It has come and it will go, and you will re-establish your honor. The affair is far more ridiculous than dramatic.” He pacifically of-

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ferred the editor his plump hand, and was on the point of quitting the room for the office.

All at once, the door leading into the office opened, and Gvózdeff made his appearance on the threshold. He had his cap on, and smiled not without a certain amount of courtesy.

"I have come to tell you, Mr. Editor, that if you want to sue me, say so—for I'm going away from here, and I don't want to be brought back, by stages, by the police."

"Take yourself off!"—howled the editor, almost sobbing with wrath, and rushed to the other end of the room.

"That means, we're quits,"—said Gvózdeff, adjusting his cap on his head, and coolly wheeling round on the threshold, he disappeared.

"O-oh, the beast!"—sighed Vasíly Ivánovitch, in rapture, to Gvózdeff's back, and with a blissful smile he began, in a leisurely manner, to put on his overcoat.

Two days after the scene described above, Gvózdeff, in a blue blouse, confined with a leather strap, in trousers hanging freely, and laced shoes, in a white cap worn over one ear, and the nape of his neck, and with a knobby stick in his hand, was walking staidly along the "Hill."

The "Hill" presented a sloping descent to the river. In ancient times, this slope had been covered with a dense grove. Now, almost the whole of the grove had been felled, the gnarled oaks and elms, shattered by thunderstorms, reared heavenward their aged hollow boles, spreading far abroad their knotted boughs. Around their roots twined the young sprouts, small bushes clung to their trunks, and everywhere amid the greenery the rambling public had trodden winding paths, which crept downward to the river all flooded with the radiance of the sun. Hori-

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zontally intersecting the "Hill" ran a broad avenue—an abandoned post-road,—and along this, chiefly, the public strolled, promenading in two files, one going in each direction.

Gvózdeff had always been very fond of strolling back and forth along this avenue, with the public, and of feeling himself one of them, and, like them, freely breathing the air impregnated with the fragrance of the foliage, of freely and lazily moving along, and being a part of something great, and feeling himself equal to all the rest.

On this day, he was on the verge of being tipsy, and his resolute, pock-marked face had a good-natured, sociable expression. From his left temple his chestnut forelocks curled upward. Handsomely shading his ear, they lay on the band of his cap, imparting to Gvózdeff the dashing air of a young artisan, who is satisfied with himself, and even ready, on the instant, to sing a song, to dance, and to fight, and not averse to drinking every minute. With these characteristic forelocks Nature herself seemed to be desirous of recommending Nikólka Gvózdeff to everyone as a fiery young fellow, who was conscious of his own value. Glancing about him approvingly, with his gray eyes puckered up, Gvózdeff, in a perfectly peaceable manner, jostled the public, bore its nudges with entire equanimity, excused himself, when he trod on the ladies' trains, in company with the rest swallowed the thick dust, and felt extremely well. Athwart the foliage of the trees, the sun could be seen setting in the meadows beyond the river. The sky there was purple, warm, and caressing, alluring one thither to the spot where it touched the rim of the dark green fields. Beneath the feet of the promenaders lay a tracery of shadows, and the throng of people trod upon them, without noticing their beauty. Foppishly thrusting



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a cigarette into the left corner of his lips, and idly emitting from the right corner little streams of smoke, Gvózdeff scanned the public, feeling within him a genuine desire to have a chat with someone, over a couple of mugs of beer in the restaurant, at the foot of the "Hill." He encountered none of his acquaintances, and no suitable opportunity for picking up a new acquaintance presented itself; for some reason, the public was gloomy, in spite of its being a festival and with clear weather, and did not respond to his communicative mood, although he had, already, more than once, stared into the faces of the people he met with a good-natured smile, and with an expression of perfect readiness to enter into conversation. All at once, in the mass of people's backs, there flashed before his eyes the back of a head which was familiar to him, smoothly clipped and flat as though chopped off—the nape of the neck belonging to the editor—Dmítry Pávlovitch Istómin. Gvózdeff smiled, when he remembered how he had ill-treated that man, and began to gaze with pleasure at Dmítry Pávlovitch's low-crowned, gray hat. Now and then the editor's hat disappeared behind other hats, and, for some reason, this disquieted Gvózdeff; he raised himself on tiptoe, to catch sight of it, and when he found it, he smiled again.

Thus, following the editor, he walked along, and recalled the time when he, Gvózdeff, had been Nikólka the locksmith, and the editor—was Mítka,\* the deacon's son. They had had another comrade, Míshka,† whom they had nicknamed the Sugar-bowl. There had also been Váska‡ Zhúkoff, the son of an official, from the last house in the

\* Mítka—colloquial diminutive for Dmítry.—*Translator.*

† Míshka—colloquial diminutive for Mikháil.—*Translator.*

‡ Váska—colloquial diminutive for Vasíly.—*Translator.*

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street. It was a nice house,—old, all overgrown with moss, all stuck around with additions. Váška's father had a very fine flock of pigeons. The courtyard of the house was a fine place in which to play at hide-and-seek, because Váška's father was miserly, and saved up in his yard all sorts of rubbish—broken carriages, and casks, and boxes. Now Váška was a physician, in the country, and on the site of the old house stood railway freight-houses. . . . They had had other chums—all little boys of from eight to ten years of age. They had all resided on the outskirts of the town, in Back Damp Street, had lived on friendly terms with each other, and in constant hostility with the horrid little boys of the other streets. They had devastated gardens and vegetable patches, they had played at knuckle-bones, at tip-cat, and other games, and had studied in the parish school. . . . Twenty-five years had elapsed since that time.

Time had been—and passed, the little boys had been as saucy and grimy-faced as Nikólka the locksmith,—and now they had become persons of importance. But Nikólka the locksmith had stuck fast in Back Damp Street. They, when they had finished the parish school, had got into the gymnasium,—he had not got in. . . . And how would it do if he were to address the editor? Say good-afternoon, and enter into conversation? He might begin by begging pardon for the row, and then talk—so, about life in general.

The editor's hat kept flitting in front of Gvózdeff's eyes, as though alluring him to itself, and Gvózdeff made up his mind. Just at that moment, the editor was walking alone, in a free space, which had formed in the crowd. He was stepping along with his thin legs in their light trousers, his head kept turning from side to side, his short-sighted

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eyes were screwed up, as he scanned the public. Gvózdeff came almost alongside of him, gazed askance at his face in an amiable way, awaiting a favorable moment, in order to wish him a good-afternoon, and, at the same time, experiencing a keen desire to know how the editor would bear himself toward him.

“Good-afternoon, Mítry Pávlovitch!”

The editor turned toward him, with one hand raised his hat, with the other adjusted the eyeglasses on his nose, surveyed Gvózdeff, and scowled.

But this did not daunt Nikolái Gvózdeff,—on the contrary, he leaned toward the editor, in the most agreeable way possible, and flooding him with the odor of vódka, he inquired:

“Are you taking a stroll?”

For a second, the editor halted; his lips and nostrils quivered scornfully, and he nodded curtly at Gvózdeff:

“What do you want?”

“I? Nothing! I just thought . . . it’s fine weather to-day! And I’m very anxious to have a talk with you about that occurrence.”

“I don’t wish to talk about anything with you!”—declared the editor, hastening his steps.

Gvózdeff did the same.

“You don’t wish to? I understand . . . you are right—I understand that very well indeed. . . . As I put you to confusion, of course, you must have a grudge against me . . .”

“You, simply . . . you’re drunk . . .” the editor halted once more.—“And if you don’t leave me in peace, I’ll summon the police.”

Gvózdeff smiled affectionately.

“Well, why?”

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The editor looked askance at him, with the anxious glance of a man who has fallen into an unpleasant position, and does not know how to extricate himself from it. The public were already staring at them with curiosity. Several persons pricked up their ears, scenting an approaching row. Istómin cast a helpless glance around him.

Gvózdeff observed it.

"Let's turn aside,"—said he, and, without awaiting the other's consent, with his shoulder he dexterously thrust Istómin to one side, away from the broad avenue, into a narrow path, which descended the hill between the bushes.

The editor made no protest against this manœuvre,—perhaps because he had no time, perhaps because, away from the public, entirely alone, he hoped to rid himself more promptly and simply of his companion. He walked quietly down the path, cautiously planting his cane on the ground, and Gvózdeff followed him, and breathed on his hat.

"There's a fallen tree not far from here, we'll sit on that. . . . Don't be angry with me, Mítry Pávlovitch, for this conduct of mine. Excuse me! For I did it out of anger. . . . Anger sometimes torments fellows like me to such a degree that you can't extinguish it with liquor. . . . Well, and at such times, one gets insolent to somebody: he strikes a passer-by in the snout, or does something else. . . . I don't repent, what's done is done; but, perhaps, I understand very well indeed, that I didn't keep within bounds that time . . . I went too far . . ."

Whether this sincere explanation touched the editor, or whether Gvózdeff's personality aroused his curiosity, or whether he comprehended that he could not get rid of this man, at all events, he asked Gvózdeff:

"What is it that you want to talk about?"

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"Why . . . about everything! My soul is afflicted within me, because I feel that I'm an offence to myself. . . . Here, let's sit down."

"I have no time . . . ."

"I know . . . the newspaper! It's eating up half your life, you're squandering all your health on it. . . . You see, I understand! What's he, the publisher? He has put his money into the paper, but you have put your blood! You have already written your eyes out. . . . Sit down!"

Along the path, in front of them, lay a large stump—the half-decayed remains of what had once been a mighty oak. The branches of a hazel-bush bent over the tree, forming a green tent; athwart the branches gleamed the sky, already arrayed in the hues of sunset; the spicy odor of fresh foliage filled the air. Gvózdeff seated himself, and turning to the editor, who still continued to stand, gazing about him with indecision, he began again:

"I have been drinking a little to-day . . . I find life tiresome, Mítry Pávlovitch! I've lagged behind my comrades, the workingmen; somehow, my thoughts take an entirely different direction. I caught sight of you to-day, and remembered that you used to be a chum of mine, you know . . . ha, ha!"

He laughed, because the editor looked at him with a swift change of expression on his face, which rendered him really ridiculous.

"A chum? When?"

"Long ago, Mítry Pávlovitch. . . . We used to live in Back Damp Street then . . . do you remember? We lived across the courtyard from each other. And opposite us Míshka the Sugar-bowl—at the present time, Mikháil Efímovitch Khruléff, the examining magistrate,

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—deigned to have his residence with his stern papa.  
. . . Do you remember Efímitch? He used to shake you and me by our top-knots. . . Come, sit down, do.”

The editor nodded his head affirmatively, and seated himself by the side of Gvózdeff. He regarded him with the intense gaze of a man who is recalling to mind something that took place long ago, and has been entirely forgotten, and he rubbed his forehead.

But Gvózdeff was carried away by his memories.

“What a life we led then! And why can’t a man remain a child all his life long? He grows up . . . why? Then he grows into the earth. All his life long he endures divers misfortunes . . . he becomes irritated, savage . . . nonsense! He lives, he lives and—at the end of his life, there’s nothing to show but trash. . . . A coffin . . . and nothing more. . . . But we used to live on then without any dark thoughts, merrily,—like little birds—that’s all that can be said of it! We flew over the fences after the fruits of other people’s labors. . . . Do you remember, one day, in Mrs. Petróvsky’s vegetable-patch, on a thieving expedition, I stuffed a cucumber up your nose? You set up a yell, and I—took to my heels. . . . You came with your mamma to my father, to complain, and my father whipped me in proper style. . . . But Míshka—Mikháil Efímovitch . . .”

The editor listened, and against his will he smiled. He wished to preserve his seriousness and dignity in the presence of this man who had evinced an inclination to be familiar. But in these stories of the bright days of childhood there was something touching, and in Gvózdeff’s tone, so far, the notes which menaced Dmítry Pávlovitch’s vanity did not ring out with especial sharpness. And

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everything round about was delightful. Somewhere up above, shuffled the feet of the promenading public on the sands of the paths, their voices were barely audible, and once in a while a laugh resounded; but the breeze was sighing,—and all those faint sounds were drowned in the melancholy rustling of the foliage. And when the rustling died away, there ensued moments of complete silence, as though everything round about were lending an attentive ear to the words of Nikolái Gvózdeff, as he confusedly related the story of his youth. . . .

“Do you remember Várka, the daughter of Kolokóltzoff the house-painter? She’s married now to Shapóshnikoff the printer. Such a fine lady . . . it scares one to pass her. . . . She was a sickly little lass in those days. . . . Do you remember, how she disappeared one day, and all we boys, from the whole street, searched the fields and ravines for her? We found her in the camp and led her home through the plain. . . . There was an awful uproar! Kolokóltzoff treated us to gingerbread, and Várka, when she saw her mother, said: ‘I’ve been with the well-born wife of an officer, and she wants me to be her daughter!’ He, he! . . . Her daughter! . . . She was a splendid little girl! . . .”

From the river were wafted certain sounds, as though someone’s mighty, grief-laden breast were moaning. A steamer was passing, and in the air floated the tumult of the water, churned up by its wheels. The sky was rose-colored, but around Gvózdeff and the editor the twilight was thickening. . . . The spring night drew gradually on. The silence became complete, profound, and Gvózdeff lowered his voice, as though yielding to its influence. . . . The editor listened to him mutely, calling up in his mind pictures of the distant past. All this had been.

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. . . And all this had been better than what was now. Only in childhood is a free soul, which does not notice the weight of the chains that are called the conditions of life, possible. Childhood knows not the sharp inflammations of conscience, knows no other falsehood save the harmless falsehood of the child. How much is unknown in the days of childhood, and how good is that ignorance! One lives . . . and gradually the comprehension of life is enlarged . . . why is it enlarged, if one dies, without having understood anything?

“So you see, Mítry Pávlovitch, it turns out, that you and I are birds from one and the same nest . . . yes! But our flights are different. . . . And when I recollect, that surely all the difference between me and my former comrades lies in the fact that I did not sit in the gymnasium over my books,—I feel bitter and disgusted. . . . Does that constitute a man? A man consists of his soul, of his relations to his neighbor, as it is said. . . . Well, then,—you are my neighbor, and what value do I possess for you? None whatever!—Isn’t that so?”

The editor, enticed away by his own thoughts, must have misunderstood his companion’s question.

“It is!”—he said, in a sincere, abstracted tone.

But Gvózdeff burst out laughing, and he caught himself up:

“That is to say, excuse me? What, precisely, are you asking about?”

“Isn’t it true that to you I’m—an empty spot. . . . Whether I exist or not is all one to you—you don’t care a fig. . . . What is my soul to you? I live alone in the world, and all the people who know me are very tired of me. Because, I have an evil character, and I’m very fond of playing all sorts of practical jokes. But, you see,



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I have feeling and brains too . . . I feel offence in my position. In what way am I worse than you? Only in my occupation . . .”

“Ye-es . . . that is sad!” said the editor, contracting his brow, then he paused, and resumed, in a rather soothing tone:—“But, you see, another point of view must be applied to the case . . .”

“Mítry Pávlovitch! Why a point of view? One man should not pay attention to another man according to the point of view, but according to the impulse of the heart! What’s that point of view? Is it possible to cast me aside because of some point of view or other? But I am cast aside in life—I make no headway in it. . . . Why? Because I’m not learned? But surely, if you learned folks would not judge from a point of view, but in some other way,—you ought not to forget me, a berry from the same field as yourselves, but draw me up toward you from below, where I rot in ignorance and exasperation of my feelings? Or—from the point of view—oughtn’t you to do it?”

Gvózdeff screwed up his eyes, and gazed triumphantly into the face of his companion. He felt that he was showing himself to the best advantage, and emitted all his philosophy, which he had thought out during the long years of his laborious, unsystematic, and sterile life. The editor was disconcerted by his companion’s attack, and tried simultaneously to decide—what sort of a man this was, and what reply he ought to make to his speech. But Gvózdeff, intoxicated with himself, continued:

“You clever people will give me a hundred answers, and the sum total of them will be—no, you ought not! But I say—you ought! Why? Because I and you folks are from one street and from one origin. . . . You

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are not the real lords of life . . . you're not noblemen. . . . From them, fellows of my sort have nothing to gain. Those men would say: 'Go to the devil'—and you'd go. Because—they're aristocrats from ancient times, but you're only aristocrats because you know grammar, and that sort of thing. . . . But you—are my equal, and I can demand from you information about my path in life. I'm of the petty burgher class, and so is Khruléff, and you . . . are a deacon's son . . . .”

“But, permit me . . . .” said the editor beseechingly, —“am I denying your right to demand?”

But Gvózdeff was not in the least interested to know what the editor denied or what he admitted; he wanted to have his say, and he felt himself, at that moment, capable of expressing everything which had ever agitated him. . . .

“Now, you will be pleased to permit me!”—he said, in a mysterious sort of whisper, bending closer to the editor, and flashing his excited eyes.—“Do you think it's easy for me to toil now for my comrades, to whom, in days gone by, I used to give bloody noses? Is it easy for me to receive forty kopéks as a tip from examining-magistrate Khruléff, for whom I put in a water-closet a year ago? Surely, he's a man of the same rank as myself. . . . And his name was Míshka the Sugar-bowl . . . he has rotten teeth now, just as he had then . . . .”

A heavy, choking lump rose in his throat: he paused for a moment, and burst out swearing—with such loud and repulsively-cynical oaths that the editor shuddered, and moved away from him. When he had got through swearing, Gvózdeff seemed to weaken, as though the fire within him had died out. He listened to himself, and no longer felt conscious of anything within him which he wished to say.

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"That's all!"—he ejaculated dully.

He had suddenly become inwardly empty, and this sensation of emptiness produced irritation in him.

The editor gazed askance at him in a thoughtful way, and silently considered—what should he say to this young fellow? He must say something nice, just, and sincere. But Dmítry Pávlovitch Istómin found nothing of what was required in his head, at the given moment, nor in his heart. For a long time past, all ideal and high-flown discussions of "questions" had evoked in him a feeling of boredom and exhaustion. He had come out to-day to rest, he had purposely avoided meeting his acquaintances,—and all of a sudden, here was this man with his harangues. Of course, there was a modicum of truth in his harangues, as there is in everything which people say. They were curious, and might serve as a very interesting theme for a feuilleton. . . . But, nevertheless, he must say something to him.

"Everything you have said—is not new, you know,"—he began. . . . —"The injustice of man's relations to man, has long been a topic of discussion. . . . But, really, these speeches of yours do present one novelty—in the sense, that they were formerly uttered by people of another sort. . . . You formulate your thoughts in a somewhat one-sided and inaccurate manner . . . "

"There's your point of view again!"—laughed Gvózdeff faintly.—"Ekh-ma, gentlemen, gentlemen! You are endowed with brains, but as to heart evidently . . . tell me something which will suit my complaint on the spot . . . so there, now!"

Having spoken thus, he hung his head, and awaited the answer. Sadness had seized upon him.

Again Istómin glanced at him, with frowning brow, and

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conscious of a strong desire to get away. It seemed to him that Gvózdeff was drunk, and for that reason had weakened after his excited speeches. He looked at the white cap, which had fallen on the nape of Gvózdeff's neck, at his pock-marked face and aggressive top-knot; with a glance he measured his whole powerful, sinewy figure, and thought to himself, that this was a very typical workingman, and if . . .

"Well, what is it?"—inquired Gvózdeff.

"But what can I say to you? To speak frankly, I do not perceive at all clearly, what you wish to hear."

"There, that's it exactly! . . . You can't make me any answer!"—grinned Gvózdeff.

The editor heaved a sigh of relief, justly assuming that the conversation was at an end, and that Gvózdeff would assault him with no further questions. . . . And all at once he thought:

"And what if he beats me? He's so vicious!"

He recalled the expression of Gvózdeff's face yonder, in the editorial room, during that stupid scene. And he cast a furtive glance of suspicion at him.

It was already dark. The silence was broken by the sounds of songs, wafted from afar on the river. People were singing in chorus, and the tenor voices were very distinctly audible. Large beetles hurtled through the air with a metallic ring. Through the foliage of the trees the stars were visible . . . now and then, one branch or another over their heads began to quiver, for some reason, and the soft trembling of the leaves made itself heard.

"There will be dew . . ." said the editor, cautiously. Gvózdeff shuddered, and turned toward him.

"What did you say?"

"There will be dew, I say; it's harmful . . ."

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“A-ah!”

They fell silent. On the river resounded the shout:

“Háy-eï! Ba-a-arge a-ho-oo-oy!”

“I think I shall go. Farewell for the present.”

“And shan’t we have a drink of beer together?”—suggested Gvózdeff suddenly, and added, with a grin:—“Do me the honor!”

“No, excuse me, I cannot just now. And then, it’s time for me to be going, you know . . .”

Gvózdeff rose from the tree, and stared sullenly at the editor.

The latter, rising also, offered him his hand.

“So you don’t want to have a drink of beer with me? Well, devil take you!”—Gvózdeff cut the interview short, slapping his cap in place with a harsh gesture.—“Aristocracy! At two kopéks the pair! I’ll get drunk by myself . . .”

The editor bravely turned his back on his companion, and walked up the path, without uttering a word. As he passed Gvózdeff, he drew his head down strangely between his shoulders, as though afraid of hitting it against something. Gvózdeff descended the hill with huge strides.

From the river resounded a cracked voice:

“Ba-a-arge a-ho-oy! De-e-evils! Send off a bo-o-o-oat!”

And among the trees rang the faint echo:

“O-o-oat!”

**VÁRENKA ÓLESOFF**



# VÁRENKA ÓLESOFF

## I.

. . . A few days after his appointment as instructor in one of the provincial universities, Ippolít Sergyéevitch Polkánoff received a telegram from his sister, from her estate in a distant forest district on the Vólga.

The telegram briefly announced:

“My husband is dead. For God’s sake, come at once to my assistance. Elizavéta.”

This alarming summons unpleasantly agitated Ippolít Sergyéevitch, interfering with his projects and his frame of mind. He had already decided to spend the summer in the country, at the house of one of his comrades, and to do a great deal of work there, in order to prepare himself to do justice to his lectures; and now, here it was necessary to travel more than a thousand versts from St. Petersburg and from the place of his appointment, in order to comfort a woman who had lost her husband, with whom, judging from her own letters, her life had been far from sweet.

He had seen his sister, for the last time, four years previously, had corresponded with her rarely, and long ago there had been established between them those purely formal relations which are so common between two relatives who are separated by distance, and by dissimilarity of their life-interests.

The telegram evoked in him the memory of his sister’s



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husband. The latter was a stout, good-natured man, fond of eating and drinking. His face was round, covered with a net-work of red veins, and his eyes were merry and small; he had a way of roguishly screwing up his left eye, and smiling sweetly, as he sang in atrocious French:

“Regardez par ci, regardez par là. . . .”

And Ippolít Sergyéevitch found it difficult to believe, that that jolly young fellow was dead, because common-place people usually live a long time.

His sister had borne herself toward the weaknesses of this man with a half-scornful condescension; being anything but a stupid woman, she had comprehended, that if you shoot at a stone, you merely lose your arrows. And it was not likely that she was greatly afflicted by his death.

But, nevertheless, it was not easy to refuse her request. He could work at her house quite as well as anywhere else. . . .

After further meditation in this direction, Ippolít Sergyéevitch decided to go, and, a couple of weeks later, on a warm June evening, fatigued with a journey of forty versts\* by posting-wagon, from the wharf to the village, he was seated at the table opposite his sister, on a terrace which overlooked the park, drinking exquisite tea.

Along the balustrade of the terrace, lilac and acacia bushes grew luxuriantly; the slanting rays of the sun, penetrating through the foliage, quivered in the air, in slender, golden ribbons. A tracery of shadows lay upon the table, closely set with country viands; the air was filled with the fragrance of the lindens, the lilacs, and the damp earth, heated by the sun. In the park birds were chirp-

\* A verst is two-thirds of a mile.—*Translator.*

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ing noisily; now and then a bee or a wasp flew to the terrace and buzzed anxiously, as it hovered about the table. Elizavéta Sergyéevna took a napkin in her hand, and flourished it in the air, in vexation, chasing the bees and the wasps off into the park.

Ippolít Sergyéevitch had already succeeded in convincing himself that his sister had not been particularly shocked by the fact of her husband's death, that she was gazing at him, her brother, in a searching way, and as she chatted with him, was concealing something from him. He had become accustomed to think of her, as a woman entirely engrossed in the cares of housekeeping, broken down with the disorders of her wedded life, and he had expected to behold her nervous, pale and exhausted. But now, as he looked at her oval face, covered with healthy sunburn, calm, confident, and extremely enlivened by the intelligent gleam of her large, bright eyes, he felt that he was pleasantly disappointed; and as he lent an ear to her remarks, he tried to hear the under-current, and to understand what it was she was withholding from him.

"I was prepared for this,—" she said, in a high, calm contralto, and her voice vibrated charmingly on the upper notes.—"After his second shock, he complained almost daily of pains in the heart, of its irregular beating, of insomnia . . . but, nevertheless, when they brought him home from the fields—I could scarcely stand on my feet. . . . They tell me that he got very excited out there, and shouted . . . and on the day before he had been to visit Ólesoff—a landed proprietor, a retired colonel, a drunkard and a cynic, broken down with the gout. By the way, he has a daughter—there's a treasure, I can tell you!—You must make her acquaintance . . ."

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"If it cannot be avoided," interposed Ippolít Sergyéevitch, glancing at his sister with a smile.

"It cannot! She is often at our house . . . but now, of course, she will come here more frequently than ever,—" she replied to him, with a smile also.

"Is she on the lookout for a husband? I'm not fitted for the part."

His sister looked him steadily in the face, which was oval, thin, with small, pointed, black beard, and a lofty, white brow.

"Why are you not fitted for the part? Of course, I am speaking in general, without any idea in connection with Miss Ólesoff,—you will understand why when you see her . . . but, surely, you are thinking of marrying?"

"Not just yet,—" he answered her briefly, raising from his glass his light-gray eyes with a cold gleam.

"Yes,—" said Elizavéta Sergyéevna thoughtfully,—  
"at the age of thirty it is both late and early, for a man to take that step. . . ."

It pleased him that she had ceased to speak of her husband's death, but why had she summoned him to her so loudly and in so frightened a manner?

"A man should marry at twenty or at forty," she said pensively,—  
"in that way, there is less risk of deceiving oneself or of deceiving another person . . . but if you do make a mistake, then, in the first case, you pay for it with the freshness of your feelings, and in the second . . . at least by your outward position, which is almost always solid in the case of a man of forty."

It struck him that she was saying this more for herself than for him, and he did not interrupt her, but leaned back in his arm-chair and deeply inhaled the aromatic air.

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“As I was saying—he had been at Ólesoff’s on the day before, and, of course, he drank there. Well, and so . . .” Elizavéta Sergyéevna shook her head sadly. —“Now . . . I am left alone . . . although, after the second year of my life with him, I felt myself inwardly quite alone. But now my position is so strange! I am twenty-eight years old, I have not lived, I have merely been attached to the service of my husband and children, . . . the children are dead. And I . . . what am I now? What am I to do, and how am I to live? I would sell this estate, and go abroad, but his brother lays claim to the inheritance, and there may be a lawsuit. I will not give up what belongs to me, without legal grounds for so doing, and I see none in the claim of his brother. What do you think about it? . . .”

“I am not a lawyer, you know,—” laughed Ippolít Sergyéevitch.—“But . . . tell me all about this, and we shall see. That brother—has he written to you?”

“Yes . . . and quite roughly. He is a gambler, a ruined man, who has sunk very low . . . my husband did not like him, although they had much in common.”

“We shall see!—” said Ippolít Sergyéevitch, and rubbed his hands with satisfaction. He was delighted to know why his sister needed him, he did not like anything that was not clear and definite. His first care was the preservation of his inward equanimity, and if anything obscure perturbed that equanimity,—a troubled disquietude and irritation arose in his soul, which anxiously incited him to clear up the thing he did not understand as promptly as possible.

“To speak frankly,”—explained Elizavéta softly, and without looking at her brother,—“this stupid claim has

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alarmed me. I am so worn out, Ippolít, I do so want to rest . . . and here, something is beginning again."

She sighed heavily, and taking his glass, she continued in a melancholy tone, which tickled her brother's ears unpleasantly:

"Eight years of life with such a man as my deceased husband give me the right, I think, to a rest. Any other woman in my place,—a woman with a less developed sense of duty and respectability—would long ago have broken that heavy chain, but I wore it, although I fainted under its weight. But the death of my children—ah, Ippolít, if you only knew what I endured when I lost them!"

He looked into her face with an expression of sympathy, but her complaints did not touch his soul. He did not like her language, a bookish sort of language, which was not natural to a person who feels deeply, and her bright eyes flitted strangely from side to side, rarely coming to a pause on anything. Her gestures were soft, and cautious, and an inward chill breathed forth from her whole finely-formed figure.

Some sort of a merry bird perched on the balustrade of the terrace, twittering, hopped along it, and flew away. The brother and sister followed it with their eyes, as they sat a few seconds in silence.

"Does anyone come to see you? Do you read?"—asked the brother, as he lighted a cigarette, thinking how delightful it would be to sit in silence, on that magnificent quiet evening, in a comfortable easy-chair, there on the terrace, listening to the quiet rustling of the foliage and waiting for the night, which would come, and extinguish the sounds, and light up the stars.

"Várenka comes, and once in a while, Mrs. Banártzeff . . . do you remember her? Liudmíla Vasílievna . . .

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she, also, is not happy with her husband . . . but she understands how to avoid taking offence. A great many men used to come to see my husband,—but not a single one of them was interesting! Decidedly, there is not a soul with whom to exchange a word . . . agriculture, hunting, county tittle-tattle, gossip—that is all they talk about. . . . However, there is one . . . a bachelor of law—Benkóvsky . . . young, and very highly educated. You remember the Benkóvskys? Wait! I think someone is coming.”

“Who is coming . . . that Benkóvsky?”—inquired Ippolít Sergyéevitch.

For some reason, his query set his sister to laughing; as she laughed, she rose from her chair, and said in a voice that was new to him:

“Várenka!”

“Ah!”

“Let us see what you will say about her. . . . Here she has made the conquest of everybody. But what a monster she is, from a spiritual point of view! However—you shall see for yourself.”

“I don’t care about it,” he declared indifferently, stretching himself out in his arm-chair.

“I will be back directly,”—said Elizavéta Sergyéevna, as she went away.

“But she will present herself without your help,” he said with concern.

“Yes, I’ll be back directly!” his sister called to him from the room.

He frowned, and remained in his chair, gazing into the park. The swift beat of a horse’s hoofs became audible, and the rumble of wheels on the ground.

Before Ippolít Sergyéevitch’s eyes stood rows of aged,

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gnarled linden trees, maples, and oaks, enveloped in the evening twilight. Their angular branches were interwoven one with another, forming overhead a thick roof of fragrant verdure, and all of them, decrepit with time, with rifted bark and broken boughs, seemed to form a living and friendly family of beings, closely united in an aspiration upward, toward the light. But their bark was thickly covered with a yellow efflorescence of mould, at their roots young trees had sprung up luxuriantly, and from this cause, on the old trees there were many dead branches, which swung in the air like lifeless skeletons.

Ippolít Sergyéevitch gazed at them, and felt an inclination to doze off there in his arm-chair, under the breath of the ancient park.

Between the trunks and boughs gleamed crimson patches of the horizon, and against this vivid background, the trees seemed still more gloomy, and wasted away. Along the avenue, which ran from the terrace into the dusky distance, the thick shadows were slowly moving, and the stillness increased every minute, inspiring confused fancies. Ippolít Sergyéevitch's imagination, yielding to the sorcery of the evening, depicted from the shadows the silhouette of a woman whom he knew, and his own by her side. They walked in silence down the avenue, into the distance, she pressed closely to him, and he felt the warmth of her body.

"How do you do!"—rang out a thick chest voice.

He sprang to his feet, and looked round, somewhat disconcerted.

Before him stood a young girl, of medium stature, in a gray gown, over her head was thrown something white and airy, like a bridal veil,—that was all he noticed in that first moment.

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She offered him her hand, inquiring:

"Ippolít Sergyéevitch, is it not? Miss Ólesoff. . I already knew that you were to arrive to-day, and came to see what you were like. I have never seen any learned men,—and I did not know what they might be like."

A strong, warm, little hand pressed his hand, and he, somewhat abashed by this unexpected attack, bowed to her in silence, was angry at himself for his confusion, and thought that, when he should look at her face, he would find there frank and coarse coquetry. But when he did look at it, he beheld large, dark eyes, which were smiling artlessly and caressingly, illuminating the handsome face. Ippolít Sergyéevitch remembered that he had seen just that sort of a face, proud with healthy beauty, in an old Italian picture. The same little mouth with splendid lips, the same brow, arched and lofty, and the huge eyes beneath it.

"Permit me . . . I will order some lights . . . pray be seated, . ." he requested her.

"Don't trouble yourself, I am quite at home here," she said, seating herself in his chair. .

He stood at the table facing her, and gazed at her, feeling that this was awkward, and that it behooved him to speak. But she, not in the least confused by his steady gaze, spoke herself. She asked him how he had come, whether he liked the country, whether he would remain there long; he answered her in monosyllables, and various fragmentary thoughts flashed through his mind. He was stunned, as it were, by a blow, and his brain, always clear, now grew turbid in the presence of feelings suddenly and chaotically aroused by force. His enchantment with her struggled with irritation at himself, and curiosity struggled with something that was akin to fear.



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But this young girl, blooming with health, sat opposite him, leaning against the back of her chair, closely enveloped in the material of her costume, which permitted a glimpse of the magnificent outlines of her shoulders, bosom and torso, and in a melodious voice full of masterful notes, uttered to him some trivialities, such as are usual when two unacquainted persons meet for the first time. Her dark chestnut hair curled charmingly, and her eyebrows and eyes were darker than her hair. On her dark neck, around her rosy, transparent ear, the skin quivered, announcing the swift circulation of the blood in her veins, a dimple made its appearance every time a smile disclosed her small, white teeth, and every fold of her garments breathed forth an exasperating seduction. There was something rapacious in the arch of her nose, and in her small teeth, which shone forth from between ripe lips, and her attitude, full of unstudied charm, reminded one of the grace of well-fed and petted kittens.

It seemed to Ippolít Sergyéevitch that he had become two persons: one half of his being was absorbed in this sensual beauty, and was slavishly contemplating it, the second half was mechanically noting the existence of the first, and feeling that it had lost its power over it. He replied to the girl's questions, and put some questions to her himself, not being in a condition to tear his eyes from her entrancing figure. He had already called her, to himself, a luxurious female, and had inwardly laughed at himself, but this did not annihilate his double existence. Thus it went on, until his sister made her appearance on the terrace, with the exclamation:

"See what a clever creature! I was hunting for her yonder, and she is already . . ."

"I went round by the park."

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"Have you made each other's acquaintance?"

"Oh, yes! I thought that Ippolít Sergyéevitch was bald, at least!"

"Shall I pour you some tea?"

"Please do."

Ippolít Sergyéevitch withdrew a little apart from them, and stood near the steps which led down into the park. He passed his hand over his face, and then drew his fingers across his eyes, as though he were wiping the dust from his face and eyes. He was ashamed of himself for having yielded to a burst of emotion, and this shame soon gave way to irritation against the young girl. To himself, he characterized the scene with her as a Kazák attack on a prospective husband, and he felt like announcing himself to her as a man who was utterly indifferent to her challenging beauty.

"I'm going to stay over night with you, and spend all day to-morrow here . ." she said to his sister.

"And how about Vasíly Stepánovitch?" asked his sister, in surprise.

"Aunt Lutchítzky is visiting us, she will look after him. . . . You know, that papa is very fond of her."

"Excuse me, . ." said Ippolít Sergyéevitch drily,—  
"I am extremely fatigued, and will go and rest . . ."

He bowed and departed, and Várenka's exclamation of approbation followed him:

"You ought to have done so long ago!"

In the tone of her exclamation he detected only good-nature, but he set it down as an attempt to ingratiate herself, and as false.

The room which had served his sister's husband as a study had been prepared for him. In the middle of it stood a heavy, awkward writing-table, before which was

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an oaken arm-chair; along one of the walls, almost for its entire length, stretched a broad, ragged Turkish divan, on the other, a harmonium, and two book-cases. Several large, soft chairs, a small smoking table beside the divan, and a chess-table at the window, completed the furniture of the room. The ceiling was low and blackened with smoke. From the walls dark spots, which were pictures and engravings of some sort, in coarse, gilded frames, peered forth—everything was heavy, old, and emitted a disagreeable odor. On the table stood a large lamp with a blue shade, and the light from it fell upon the floor.

Ippolít Sergyéevitch halted at the edge of this circle of light, and feeling a sensation of confused trepidation, glanced at the windows of the room. There were two of them, and outside, in the gloom of evening the dark silhouettes of the trees were outlined. He went to the windows, and opened both of them. Then the room was filled with the fragrance of the blossoming lindens, and with it floated in a burst of hearty laughter in a chest voice.

On the divan a bed had been made up for him, and it occupied a little more than half of the divan. He glanced at it, and began to undo his necktie; but then, with an abrupt movement, he pushed an arm-chair to the window, and seated himself in it, with a scowl.

This sensation of incomprehensible trepidation disquieted his mind, and irritated him. The feeling of dissatisfaction with himself rarely presented itself to him, but when it did, it never seized hold upon him powerfully, or for long—he managed to get rid of it promptly. He was convinced that a man should and can understand his emotions, and develop or suppress them; and when people

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talked to him about the mysterious complication of man's psychical life, he grinned ironically, and called such opinions metaphysics. It was all the worse for him now to feel that he was entering the sphere of some incomprehensible emotions or other.

He asked himself: Is it possible that the meeting with this healthy and handsome young girl—who must be extremely sensual and stupid,—was it possible that this meeting could have such a strange influence upon him? And after having carefully scrutinized the series of impressions of that day, he was compelled to answer himself in the affirmative. Yes, it was so because she had taken his mind unawares, because he was extremely fatigued with the journey, and had been in a dreamy mood which was quite unusual for him at the moment when she made her appearance before him.

This reflection somewhat soothed him, and she immediately presented herself to his eyes in her splendid, maidenly beauty. He contemplated her, closing his eyes and nervously inhaling the smoke of his cigarette, but as he contemplated her, he criticised.

“In reality,”—he reflected,—“she is vulgar: there is too much blood and muscle in her healthy body, and there are too few nerves. Her ingenuous face is not intelligent, and the pride which beams in the frank gaze of her deep, dark eyes is the pride of a woman who is convinced of her beauty, and is spoiled by the admiration of men. My sister said that this Várenka makes a conquest of everybody.”—Of course, she was trying to make a conquest of him, also. But he had come hither to work, and not to frolic, and she would soon understand that.

“But am not I thinking a great deal about her, for a first encounter?”—flashed through his mind.

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The disk of the moon, huge and blood-red in hue, was rising somewhere, far away behind the trees of the park: it gazed forth from the darkness like the eye of a monster, born of it. Faint sounds, coming from the direction of the village, were borne upon the air. . Now and then, in the grass beneath the window, a rustling resounded; it must be a tortoise or a hedgehog on the prowl. A nightingale was singing somewhere. And the moon mounted slowly in the sky, as though the fateful necessity of its movement was understood by it and wearied it.

Flinging his cigarette, which had gone out, from the window, Ippolít Sergyéevitch rose, undressed, and extinguished the lamp. Then the darkness poured into the room from the garden, the trees moved up to the windows, as though desirous of looking in; on the floor lay two streaks of moonlight, still faint and turbid.

The springs of the divan creaked shrilly under the body of Ippolít Sergyéevitch, and overcome by the pleasant coolness of the linen sheets, he stretched himself out, and lay still on his back. Soon he was dozing, and under his window he heard someone's cautious footsteps and a thick whisper:

" . . . Má-arya. . . Are you there? Hey?" . . .

With a smile, he fell fast asleep.

And in the morning, when he awoke in the brilliant sunlight, which filled his room, he smiled again at the memory of the preceding evening, and of the young girl. He presented himself at tea carefully dressed, cold and serious, as was befitting a learned man; but when he saw that his sister was seated alone at the table, he involuntarily burst out:

" But where is . . . ."

His sister's sly smile stopped him before he had fin-

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ished his question, and he seated himself, in silence, at the table. Elizavéta Sergyéevna scrutinized his costume in detail, smiling all the while, and paying no heed to his involuntary scowl. Her significant smile enraged him.

"She rose long ago, and she and I have been to bathe, and she must be in the park now . . . and will soon make her appearance,—" explained Elizavéta Sergyéevna.

"How circumstantial you are,—" he said, with a laugh. —"Please give orders to have my things unloaded immediately after tea."

"And have them taken out?"

"No, no, that's not necessary. I'll do that myself, otherwise everything will get mixed up. . . . There are books and candy for you. ."

"Thanks! That's nice of you . . . and here comes Várenka!"

She made her appearance in the doorway, in a thin, white gown, which fell from her shoulders to her feet in rich folds. Her costume resembled a child's blouse, and in it she looked like a child. Pausing for a second at the door, she asked:

"Have you been waiting for me?—" and approached the table as noiselessly as a cloud.

Ippolít Sergyéevitch bowed to her in silence, and as he shook her hand, her arm being bared to the elbow, he perceived a delicate odor of violets which emanated from her.

"How you have scented yourself!" exclaimed Elizavéta Sergyéevna.

"Is it any more than I always do? You are fond of perfumes, Ippolít Sergyéevitch? I am—awfully! When the violets are in bloom, I pluck them every morning after my bath, and rub them in my hands,—I learned that in the pro-gymnasium. . Do you like violets?"

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He drank his tea, and did not glance at her, but he felt her eyes on his face.

"I really have never thought about it—whether I like them or not,—" he said drily, shrugging his shoulders, but as he involuntarily glanced at her, he smiled.

Shaded by the snow-white material of her gown, her face flamed with a magnificent flush, and her deep eyes beamed with clear joy. She breathed forth health, freshness, unconscious happiness. She was as good as a bright May morning in the north.

"You haven't thought about it?—" she exclaimed.—  
"But how is that . . . seeing that you are a botanist."

"But not a floriculturist,—" he explained briefly, and involuntarily reflecting that this might be rude, he turned his eyes away from her face.

"But are not botany and floriculture one and the same?—" she inquired, after a pause.

His sister laughed unrestrainedly. And he suddenly became conscious that this laugh made him writhe, for some reason, and he exclaimed pityingly to himself:

"Yes, she is stupid!"

But later on, as he explained to her the difference between botany and floriculture, he softened his verdict, and pronounced her merely ignorant. As she listened to his intelligent and serious remarks, she gazed at him with the eyes of an attentive pupil, and this pleased him. As he talked, he often turned his eyes from her face to his sister's, and in her gaze, which was immovably fixed on Várenka's face, he discerned eager envy. This interfered with the speech, as it called forth in him a sentiment allied to disdain for his sister.

"Ye-es,—" said the young girl slowly,—"so that's how it is! And is botany an interesting science?"

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"Hm! you see, one must look upon science from the point of view of its utility to men,—" he explained, with a sigh. Her lack of development, allied with her beauty, increased his compassion for her. But she, meditatively tapping the edge of her cup with her teaspoon, asked him:

"Of what utility can it be, that you know how burdock grows?"

"The same which we deduce from studying the phenomena of life in any one man."

"A man and a burdock . . ." she smiled. "Does one man live like all the rest?"

He found it strange that this uninteresting conversation did not fatigue him.

"Do I eat and drink in the same way as the peasants?" she continued seriously, contracting her brows. "And do many people live as I do?"

"How do you live?"—he inquired, foreseeing that this question would change the course of the conversation. He wished to do so, because a malicious, sneering element had now been added to the envy in the gaze which his sister had fastened upon Várenka.

"How do I live?"—the girl suddenly flushed up.—"Well!" And she even closed her eyes with satisfaction. "You know, I wake up in the morning, and if the day is bright, I immediately feel dreadfully gay! It is as though I had received a costly and beautiful gift, which I had long been wanting to possess. . . . I run and take my bath—we have a river with springs—the water is cold, and it fairly nips the body! There are very deep spots, and I plunge straight into them, head first, from the bank—splash! It fairly burns one, all over . . . you fly into the water as from a precipice, and there is a ringing in your head. . . . You come to the surface,



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tear yourself out of the water, and the sun looks down at you and laughs! Then I go home through the forest, I gather flowers, I inhale the forest air until I am intoxicated; when I arrive, tea is ready! I drink tea, and before me stand flowers . . . and the sun gazes at me. . . . Ah, if you only knew how I love the sun! Then the day advances, and housekeeping cares begin . . . everyone loves me at home, they all understand and obey at once,—and everything whirls on like a wheel until the evening . . . then the sun sets, the moon and the stars make their appearance . . . how beautiful and how new this always is! you understand! I cannot say it intelligibly . . . why it is so good to live! . . . But perhaps you feel just the same yourself, do you? Surely, you understand why such a life is good and interesting?”

“Yes . . . of course!—” he assented, ready to wipe the venomous smile from his sister’s face with his hand.

He looked at Várenka, and did not restrain himself from admiring her, as she quivered with the desire to impart to him the strength of the exultation which filled her being, but this ecstasy of hers heightened his feeling of pity for her to the degree of a painfully-poignant sensation. He beheld before him a being permeated with the charm of vegetable life, full of rough poetry, overwhelmingly beautiful, but not ennobled by brains.

“And in the winter? Are you fond of winter? It is all white, healthy, stimulating, it challenges you to contend with it. . . .”

A sharp ring of the bell interrupted her speech. Elizavéta Sergyéevna had rung, and when a tall maid, with a round, kind face, and roguish eyes, flew into the room, she said to her, in a weary voice:

“Clear away the dishes, Másha!”

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Then she began to walk up and down the room, in a preoccupied way, shuffling her feet.

All this somewhat sobered the enthusiastic young girl; she twitched her shoulders as though she were shaking something from them, and rather abashed she asked Ippolít Sergyéevitch:

“Have I bored you with my stupid tales?”

“Come, how can you say so?”—he protested.

“No, seriously,—I have made myself appear stupid to you?”—she persisted.

“But why?!”—exclaimed Ippolít Sergyéevitch and was surprised that he had said it so warmly and sincerely.

“I am wild . . . that is to say, I am not cultivated . . .” she said apologetically.—“But I am very glad to talk with you . . . because you are a learned man, and so . . . unlike what I imagined you to be.”

“And what did you imagine me to be like?”—he queried, with a smile.

“I thought you would always be talking about various wise things . . . why, and how, and this is not so, but this other way, and everybody is stupid, and I alone am wise. . . . Papa had a friend visiting him, he was a colonel too, like papa, and he was learned, like you . . . But he was a military learned man . . . what do you call it . . . of the General Staff . . . and he was frightfully puffed up . . . in my opinion, he did not even know anything, but simply bragged. . . .”

“And you imagined that I was like that?”—enquired Ippolít Sergyéevitch.

She was disconcerted, blushed, and springing from her chair, she ran about the room in an absurd way, saying in confusion:

“Akh, how can you think so . . . now, could I. . . .”

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“Well, see here, my dear children . . .” remarked Elizavéta Sergyéevna, scanning them with her eyes screwed up,—“I’m going off to attend to something about the housekeeping, and I leave you . . . to the will of God!”

And she vanished, with a laugh, rustling her skirts as she went. Ippolít Sergyéevitch looked after her reproachfully, and reflected, that he must have a talk with her about her way of behaving toward this really very charming, though undeveloped young girl.

“Do you know, I have an idea—would you like to go in the boat? We will drive to the forest, and then have a stroll there, and be back by dinner-time. Shall we? I’m awfully glad that the day is so bright, and that I’m not at home. . . . For papa has another attack of gout, and I should have been obliged to fuss about him. And papa is capricious when he is ill.”

Amazed at her frank egotism, he did not immediately reply to her in the affirmative, and when he did reply, he recalled the intention, which had arisen in him the evening before, and with which he had emerged from his chamber that morning. But, surely, she had afforded no ground, so far, for suspicion of a desire to conquer his heart? In her speeches, everything was perceptible except coquetry. And, in conclusion, why not spend one day with such . . . an undoubtedly original young girl?

“And do you know how to row? Never mind if you do it badly . . . I will do it myself, I am strong. And the boat is so light. Shall we go?”

They went out upon the terrace, and descended into the park. By the side of his tall, thin figure, she appeared shorter and more plump. He offered her his arm, but she declined it.

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“Why? It is nice when one is tired, but otherwise, it only hinders one in walking.”

He smiled as he looked at her through his eyeglasses, and walked on, adjusting his stride to her pace, which greatly pleased him. Her walk was light and graceful,—her white gown floated around her form, but not a single fold undulated. In one hand she held a parasol, with the other she gesticulated freely and gracefully, as she told him about the beauty of the suburbs of the village.

Her arm, bared to the elbow, was strong and brown, covered with a golden down, and as it moved through the air, it compelled Ippolít Sergyéevitch's eyes to follow it attentively. . . . And again, in the dark depths of his soul, a confused, incomprehensible apprehension of something began to tremble. He tried to annihilate it, asking himself: What had prompted him to follow this young girl? And he answered himself:—curiosity, a calm and pure desire to contemplate her beauty.

“Yonder is the river! Go and take your seat in the boat, and I will get the oars at once. . . .”

And she disappeared among the trees before he could ask her to show him where he could find the oars.

In the still, cold water of the river, the trees were reflected upside down; he seated himself in the boat, and gazed at them. These spectral images were more splendid and beautiful than the living trees, which stood on the bank, shading the water with their curved and gnarled branches. Their reflection flattered them, thrusting into the background what was deformed, and creating in the water a clear and harmonious fantasy, on the foundation of the paltry reality, disfigured by time.

As he admired the transparent picture, surrounded by the silence and the gleam of the sun which was not yet

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hot, and drank in along with the air the songs of the larks full of the joy of existence, Ippolít Sergyéevitch felt springing into life within him a sensation of repose which was novel and agreeable to him, which caressed his brain, and lulled to sleep its constant and rebellious striving to understand and to explain. Quiet peace reigned around, not a leaf quivered on the trees, and in this peace the mute triumph of nature was unceasingly in progress, life, always smitten with death but invincible, was being soundlessly created, and death was working quietly, smiting all things, but never winning the victory. And the blue sky shone in triumphant beauty.

In the background of the picture in the water of the river, a white beauty, with a smile on her face, made her appearance. She stood there, with the oars in her hands, as though inviting him to go to her, mute, very lovely, and she seemed to have dropped down from the sky.

Ippolít Sergyéevitch knew that it was Várenka, emerging from the park, and that she was looking at him, but he did not wish to destroy the enchantment by a sound or a movement.

“Say, what a dreamer you are!—” her astonished exclamation rang out on the air.

Then, with regret, he turned away from the water, glanced at the girl, who was descending vivaciously and easily to the shore, down the steep path from the park.

And his regret vanished with this glance at her, for this girl was, in reality, enchantingly beautiful.

“I could not possibly have imagined that you were fond of dreaming! You have such a stern, serious face . . . You will steer: is that right? We will row upstream . . . it is more beautiful there . . . and, in general, it is more interesting to go against the current, because then you row, you get exercise, you feel yourself . . .”

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The boat, pushed out from the shore, rocked lazily on the sleepy water, but a powerful stroke of the oars immediately put it alongside of the bank, and rolling from side to side under a second stroke, it glided lightly forward.

"We will row under the hilly shore, because it is shady there . . ." said the young girl, as she cut the water with skilful strokes. "Only, the current is weak here, . . . but on the Dnyépr,—Aunt Lutchítzky has an estate there—it's a terror, I can tell you! It fairly tears the oars out of your hands . . . you haven't seen the rapids of the Dnyépr? . . ."

"Only the threshold of the door," \* Ippolít Sergyéevitch tried to pun.

"I have been through them," she said, laughing.—"It was fine! One day, they came near smashing the boat, and in that case, we should infallibly have been drowned. . ."

"Well, that would not have been fine at all," said Ippolít Sergyéevitch seriously.

"What of that? I'm not in the least afraid of death . . . although I love to live. Perhaps it will be as interesting there as it is here on earth. . ."

"And perhaps there is nothing at all there . . ." he said, glancing at her with curiosity.

"Well, how can there help being!—" she exclaimed, with conviction.—"Of course there is!"

He decided not to interfere with her—let her go on philosophizing; at the proper moment he would stop her, and make her spread out before him the whole miserable little world of her imagination. She sat opposite him, with her small feet resting against a cross-bar, nailed to the bottom of the boat, and with every stroke of the oars,

\* *Poróg*, a threshold,—*porogi*, rapids, in Russian.—*Translator*.

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she bent her body backward. Then, beneath the thin material of her gown, her virgin bosom was outlined in relief, high, springy, quivering with the exercise.

"She does not wear corsets,—” said Ippolít Sergyéevitch to himself, dropping his eyes. But there they rested on her tiny feet. Pressed against the bottom of the boat, her legs were tensely stretched, and at such times their outlines were visible to the knees.

"Did she put on that idiotic dress on purpose?"—he said to himself in vexation, and turned away, to look at the high shore.

They had passed the park, and now they were floating under a steep cliff; from it swung curly pea-vines, the long slender wreaths of pumpkin, with their velvety leaves, large yellow circles of the sunflower, standing on the edge of the abyss, looked down into the water. The other shore, low and smooth, stretched away into the distance, to the green walls of the forest, and was thickly covered with grass, succulent and brilliant in hue; pale blue and dark blue flowers, as pretty as the eyes of children, peered caressingly forth from it at the boat. And ahead of them stood the dark-green forest—and the river pierced its way into it, like a piece of cold steel.

"Aren't you warm?" asked Várenka.

He glanced at her, and felt abashed:—upon her brow, beneath her crown of waving hair, glistened drops of perspiration, and her breast heaved high and rapidly.

"Pray forgive me!"—he exclaimed penitently.—"I forgot myself in looking about me . . . you are tired . . . give me the oars!"

"I will not give them to you! Do you think I am tired? That is an insult to me! We haven't gone two versts yet . . . No, keep your seat . . . we will land presently, and take a stroll."

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It was evident from her face, that it was useless to argue with her, and shrugging his shoulders with vexation, he made no reply, thinking to himself with displeasure: "It is plain that she considers me weak."

"You see—this is the road to our house,—" she pointed it out to him on the shore, with a nod of her head.—"Here is the ford across the river, and from here to our house is fourteen versts. It is fine on our place, also, more beautiful than on your Polkánovka."

"Do you live in the country during the winter?" he asked.

"Why not? You see, I have the entire charge of the housekeeping, papa never rises from his chair. . . He is carried through the rooms."

"But you must find it tiresome to live in that way?"

"Why? I have an awful lot to do . . . and only one assistant—Níkon, papa's orderly. He is already an old man, and he drinks, besides, but he's awfully strong, and knows his business. The peasants are afraid of him . . . he beats them, and they also once beat him terribly . . . very terribly! He is remarkably honest, and he's devoted to papa and me . . . he loves us like a dog! And I love him, too. Perhaps you have read a romance, where the hero is an officer, Count Grammont, and he had an orderly also, Sadi-Coco?"

"I have not read it,—" confessed the young savant modestly.

"You must be sure to read it—it is a good romance,—" she advised him with conviction.—"When Níkon pleases me, I call him Sadi-Coco. At first he used to get angry with me for that, but one day I read that romance to him, and now he knows that it is flattering for him to be like Sadi-Coco."



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Ippolít Sergyéevitch looked at her, as a European looks at a delicately executed but fantastically-deformed statue of a Chinaman; with a mixture of amazement, compassion and curiosity. But she, with ardor, related to him the feats of Sadi-Coco, filled with disinterested devotion to Count Louis Grammont.

“Excuse me, Varvára \* Vasílievna,” he interrupted her, —“but have you read the romances of the Russian writers?”

“Oh, yes! But I don’t like them—they are tiresome, very tiresome! And they always write things which I know just as well as they do. They cannot invent anything interesting, and almost everything they say is true.”

“But don’t you like the truth?”—asked Ippolít Sergyéevitch kindly.

“Ah, no indeed! I always speak the truth, straight to people’s faces, and . . .”

She paused, reflected, and inquired:

“What is there to like in that? It is my habit, how can one like it?”

He did not manage to say anything to her on this point, because she quickly and loudly gave the command:

“Steer to the right . . . be quick! To that oak-tree, yonder . . . Aï, how awkward you are!”

The boat did not obey his hand, and ran ashore broadside on, although he churned the water forcibly with his oar.

“Never mind, never mind,” she said, and suddenly rising to her feet, she sprang over the side.

Ippolít Sergyéevitch uttered a low shriek, and stretched his arms toward her, but she was standing uninjured on

\* *Värenka* is the caressing diminutive of *Varvára*.—*Translator*.

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the shore, holding the chain of the boat in her hands, and apologetically asking him:

“Did I frighten you?”

“I thought you would fall into the water,—” he said softly.

“But could anyone fall there? And moreover, the water is not deep there,—” she defended herself, dropping her eyes, and drawing the boat to the bank. And he, as he sat at the stern, reflected that he ought to have done that.

“Do you see what a forest there is?—” she said, when he had stepped out on the bank, and stood beside her.—“Isn’t it fine here? There are no such beautiful forests around St. Petersburg, are there?”

In front of them lay a narrow road, hemmed in on both sides by tree trunks of different sizes. Under their feet the gnarled roots, crushed by the wheels of peasant-carts, lay outstretched, and over them was a thick tent of boughs, with here and there, high aloft, blue scraps of sky. The rays of sunlight, slender as violin-strings, quivered in the air, obliquely intersecting this narrow, green corridor. The odor of rotting foliage, of mushrooms and birch trees, surrounded them. Birds flitted past, disturbing the solemn stillness of the forest with their lively songs and anxious twittering. A woodpecker was tapping somewhere, a bee was buzzing, and in front of them, as though showing them the road, two butterflies fluttered, in pursuit of each other.

They strolled slowly on. Ippolít Sergyéevitch was silent, and did not interfere with Várenka’s finding words wherewith to express her thoughts, while she said warmly to him:

“I don’t like to read about the peasants; what can there

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be that is interesting in their lives? I know them, I live with them, and I see that people do not write accurately, do not write the truth about them. They are described as such wretched creatures, but they are only base, and there is nothing to pity them for. They want only one thing—to cheat us, to steal something from us. They are always importuning us, always moaning, they're disgusting, dirty . . . and they're clever, oh! they're even very cunning. Oh, if you only knew how they torture me sometimes!"

She had warmed up to her theme now, and wrath and bad humor were expressed on her face. Evidently, the peasants occupied a large place in her life; she rose to hatred, as she depicted them. Ippolít Sergyéevitch was astonished at the violence of her agitation, but, as he did not care to hear these sallies from the master's point of view, he interrupted the young girl:

"You were speaking of the French writers. . . ."

"Ah, yes! That is to say, about the Russian writers,—"  
she corrected him, calming down,—"you ask, why the Russians write worse than they,—that is clear enough! because they do not invent anything interesting. The French writers have real heroes, who do not talk like everybody else, and who behave differently. They are always brave, in love, jolly . . . but with us, the heroes are simple little men, without daring, without fiery feelings,—ugly, pitiful little creatures—the most real sort of men, and nothing more! Why are they heroes? You will never understand that in a Russian book. The Russian hero is a stupid, sluggish sort of fellow, he's always disgusted with something, he's always thinking of something incomprehensible, and he pities everybody, and he himself is pitiful, ve-ery pi-tiful indeed! He meditates, and talks

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and then he goes to make a declaration of love, and then he meditates again until he gets married . . . and when he is married, he says sour nonsense to his wife, and abandons her. . . . What is there interesting in that? It even angers me, because it resembles a deception—instead of a hero, there is always some sort of a stuffed scarecrow stuck up in a romance! And never, while you are reading a Russian book, can you forget real life,—is that nice? But when you read the works of a Frenchman—you shudder for the heroes, you pity them, you hate, you want to fight when they fight, you weep when they perish . . . you wait for the end of the romance with passionate interest, and when you read it—you almost cry with vexation, because that is all. You live—but in Russian books, it is utterly incomprehensible why men live. Why write books, if you cannot narrate anything unusual? Really, it is strange!”

“There is a great deal which might be said in reply to you, Varvára Vasílievna,—” he stemmed the stormy tide of her speech.

“Well then, reply!—” she burst out, with a smile.—“Of course, you will rout me!”

“I shall try. First of all, what Russian authors have you read?”

“Various . . . but they are all alike. Take Saliás, for example . . . he imitates the French, but badly. However, he has Russian heroes also, and can one write anything interesting about them? And I have read a great many others—Mórdovtzeff, Márkevitch, Pazúkhin, I think—you see, even from their names it is plain that they cannot write well! You haven’t read them? But have you read Fortuné de Boisgobey? Ponson du Terrail? Arsène Houssaye? Pierre Zaconné? Dumas, Gaboriau,

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Borne? How fine, good heavens! Wait . . . do you know what pleases me most in romances is the villains, those who so artfully weave various spiteful plots, who murder and poison, . . . they're clever, strong . . . and when, at last, they are caught,—rage seizes upon me, and I even go so far as to cry. Everybody hates the villain, everybody is against him—he is alone against them all! That's—a hero! And those others, the virtuous people, become disgusting, when they win . . . And, in general, do you know, people please me so long as they strongly desire something, march forward somewhere, seek something, torment themselves . . . but if they have reached their goal, and have come to a halt, then they are no longer interesting . . . they are even insipid!”

Excited, and, probably, proud of what she had said to him, she walked slowly by his side, raising her head prettily, and flashing her eyes.

He looked into her face, and nervously twisting his head, he sought for a retort which should, at one stroke, tear from her mind that coarse veil of dust which enveloped it. But, while feeling himself bound to reply to her, he wished to listen longer to her ingenuous and original chatter, to behold her again carried away with her opinions, and sincerely laying bare her soul before him. He had never heard such speeches; they were hideous and impossible in his eyes, but, at the same time, everything she had said harmonized, to perfection, with her rather rapacious beauty. Before him was an unpolished mind, which offended him by its roughness, and a woman who was seductively beautiful, who irritated his sensuality. These two forces crushed him down with all the energy of their directness, and he must set up something in opposition to them, otherwise, he felt—they might drive him out of the

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wonted ruts of those views and moods, with which he had dwelt in peace until he met her. He possessed a clear sense of logic, and he had argued well with persons of his own circle. But how was he to talk with her, and what ought he say to her, in order to urge her mind into the right road, and ennoble her soul, which had been deformed by stupid novels, and the society of the peasants, and of that soldier, her drunken father?

“Ugh, how foolishly I have been talking!—” she exclaimed, with a sigh.—“I have bored you, haven’t I?”

“No, but . . .”

“You see, I’m very glad to know you. Until you came, I had no one to talk with. Your sister does not like me, and is always angry with me . . . it must be because I give my father vódka, and because I thrashed Níkon. . . .”

“You?! You thrashed him? Eh . . . how did you do that?”—said Ippolít Sergyéevitch, in amazement.

“Very simply, I lashed him with papa’s kazák whip, that’s all! You know, they were threshing the grain, there was an awful hurry, and he, the beast, was drunk! Wasn’t I angry! How dared he get drunk when the work was seething, and his eyes were needed in every direction? Those peasants, they. . . .”

“But, listen, Varvára Vasílievna,—” he began, impressively and as gently as possible,—“is it nice to beat a servant? Is that noble? Reflect! Did those heroes, whom you adore, beat their admirers? . . . Sadi-Coco. . . .”

“Oh, indeed they did! One day, Count Louis gave Coco such a box on the ear, that I even felt sorry for the poor little soldier. And what can I do with them, except beat them? It’s a good thing I am able to do it . . . for I am strong! Feel what muscles I’ve got!”

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Bending her arm at the elbow, she proudly offered it to him. He laid his hand on her arm above her elbow, and pressed it hard with his fingers, but immediately recollected himself, and in confusion, blushing crimson, he looked around him. Everywhere the trees stood in silence, and only. . . .

In general, he was not modest with women, but this woman, by her simplicity and trustfulness made him so, although she kindled in him a feeling which was perilous to him.

"You have enviable health,—" he said, staring intently and thoughtfully at her little, sunburned hand, as it adjusted the folds of her gown on her bosom.—"And I think that you have a very good heart,—" he broke out, unexpectedly to himself.

"I don't know!"—she retorted, shaking her head.—"Hardly,—I have no character: sometimes I feel sorry for people, even for those whom I do not like."

"Only sometimes?—" he laughed.—"But, surely, they are always deserving of pity and sympathy."

"What for?"—she inquired, smiling also.

"Cannot you see how unhappy they are? Take those peasants of yours, for example. How difficult it is for them to live, and how much injustice, woe, torture there is in their lives."

This burst hotly from him, and she looked attentively at his face, as she said:

"You must be very good, if you speak like that. But, you see, you don't know the peasants, you have not lived in the country. They are unhappy, it is true—but who is to blame for that? They are crafty, and no one prevents their becoming happy."

"But they have not even bread enough to satisfy their hunger!"

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"I should think not! See what a lot of them there are. . . ."

"Yes, there are a great many of them! But there is a great deal of land, also . . . for there are people who own tens of thousands of desyatínas.\* For instance, how much have you?"

"Five hundred and seventy-three desyatínas . . . Well, and what of that? Is it possible . . . come, listen to me! Is it possible to give it to them?"

She gazed at him with the look of an adult on a child, and laughed softly. This laughter confused and angered him. There flashed up within him the desire to convince her of the errors of her mind.

And, pronouncing his words distinctly, even sharply, he began to talk to her about the injustice of the distribution of wealth, about the majority of men's lack of rights, about the fatal struggle for a place in life and for a morsel of bread, about the power of the rich and the helplessness of the poor, and about the mind—the guide in life, crushed by century-long injustice, and the host of prejudices, which are advantageous to the powerful minority of people.

She maintained silence, as she walked along by his side, and gazed at him with curiosity and surprise.

Around them reigned the dusky tranquillity of the forest, that tranquillity across which sounds seem to slide, without disturbing its melancholy harmony. The leaves of the aspens quivered nervously, as though the trees were impatiently awaiting something passionately longed for.

"The duty of every honest man," said Ippolít Sergyéevitch impressively, "is to contribute to the conflict on behalf of the enslaved all his brain, and all his heart, en-

\* A *desyatína* is 2.70 acres.—*Translator*.



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deavoring either to put an end to the tortures of the conflict, or to hasten its progress. For that genuine heroism is required, and precisely in this conflict is where you ought to look for it. Outside of it—there is no heroism. The heroes of this fight are the only ones who are worthy of admiration and imitation . . . and you ought to direct your attention precisely to this spot, Varvára Vasílievna, seek your heroes here, expend your strength here . . . it seems to me, that you might become a notably-steadfast defender of the truth! But, first of all, you must read a great deal, you must learn to understand life in its real aspect, unadorned by fancy . . . you must fling all those stupid romances into the fire. . .”

He paused, and wiping the perspiration from his brow, he waited—wearied with his long speech—to see what she would say.

She was gazing into the distance, straight ahead of her, with her eyes narrowed, and on her face quivered shadows. Five minutes of silence were broken by her quiet exclamation:

“How well you talk! . . . Is it possible that everybody in the university can talk so well?”

The young savant heaved a hopeless sigh, and expectation of her answer gave place within him to a dull irritation against her, and compassion for himself. Why would not she accept what was so logically clear for every being endowed with the very smallest reasoning powers? What, precisely, was lacking in his remarks, that they failed to strike home to her feelings?

“You talk very well!—” she sighed, without waiting for him to reply, and in her eyes he read genuine satisfaction.

“But do I speak truthfully?”—he asked.

“No!—” replied the young girl, without stopping to

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think.—“ Although you are a learned man, I shall argue with you. For, you see, I also understand some things!—You speak so that it appears . . . as though people were building a house, and all of them were equals in the work. And even not they only, but everything:—the bricks, and the carpenters, and the trees, and the master of the house—with you, everything is equal to everything else. But is that possible? The peasant must work, you must teach, and the Governor must watch, to see if everybody does what is necessary. And then you said, that life is a battle . . . well, where is it? On the contrary, people live very peaceably. But if it is a battle, then there must be vanquished people. But the general utility is something that I cannot understand. You say that general utility consists in the equality of all men. But that is not true! My papa is a colonel—how is he the equal of Níkon or of a peasant? And you—you are a learned man, but are you the equal of our teacher of the Russian language, who drank vódka, who was red-headed, stupid, and blew his nose loudly, like a trumpet? Aha!”

She exulted, regarding her arguments as irresistible, while he admired her joyous agitation, and felt satisfied with himself, because he had caused her this joy.

But his mind strove to solve the problem why the solid thought, unassailed by analysis, which he had aroused, worked in a direction exactly opposite to the one in which he had thrust it?

“ I like you and I do not like some other person . . . where is the equality? ”

“ You like me?—” Ippolít Sergyéevitch inquired, rather abruptly.

“ Yes . . . very much! ” she nodded her head affirmatively, and immediately asked:

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“What of it?”

He was frightened for himself in the presence of the abyss of ingenuousness which looked forth at him from her clear gaze.

“Can this be her way of coquetting?”—he thought—“she has read romances enough, apparently, to understand herself as a woman. . . .”

“Why do you ask about that?”—she persisted, gazing into his face with curious eyes.

Her gaze confused him.

“Why?”—He shrugged his shoulders,—“I think it is natural. You are a woman . . . I am a man . . .” he explained, as calmly as he could.

“Well, and what of that? All the same, there is no reason why you should know. You see, you are not preparing to marry me!”

She said this so simply, that he was not even disconcerted. It merely struck him, that some power, with which it was useless to contend in view of its blind, elemental character, was altering the work of his brain from one direction to another. And, with a shade of playfulness, he said to her:

“Who knows? . . . And then . . . the desire to please, and the desire to marry, or to get married—are not identical, as you surely must know.”

She suddenly burst out into a loud laugh, and he immediately cooled under her laughter, and mutely cursed both himself and her. Her bosom quivered with rich, sincere mirth, which merrily shook the air, but he remained silent, guiltily awaiting a retort to his playfulness.

“Okh! well, what sort . . . what sort of a wife . . . should I make for you! It’s as ridiculous . . . as the ostrich and the bee! Ha, ha, ha!”

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And he, also, broke into laughter,—not at her queer comparison, but at his own failure to comprehend the springs which governed the movements of her soul.

“You are a charming girl!”—he broke out sincerely.

“Give me your hand . . . you walk very slowly, and I will pull you along! It is time for us to turn back . . . high time! We have been roaming for four hours . . . and Elizavéta Sergyéevna will be displeased with us, because we are late for dinner. . .”

They went back. Ippolít Sergyéevitch felt himself bound to return to his explanation of her errors, which did not permit him to feel as free by her side as he would have liked to be. But first it was necessary to suppress within himself that obscure uneasiness, which was dully fermenting in him, impeding his intention to listen calmly to her arguments, and to controvert them with decision. It would be so easy for him to cut away the abnormal excrescence from her brain by the cold logic of his mind, if that strange, enervating, nameless sensation did not embarrass him. What was it? It resembled a disinclination to introduce into the spiritual realm of this young girl ideas which were foreign to her. . . . But such an evasion of his obligations would be shameful in a man who was steadfast in his principles. And he regarded himself in that light, and was profoundly convinced of the power of his mind, and of its supremacy over feeling.

“Is to-day Tuesday?” she said.—“Yes, of course. That means, that three days hence the little black gentleman will arrive. . .”

“Who will arrive, and where, did you say?”

“The little black gentleman, Benkóvsky, will come to us on Saturday.”

“Why?”

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She began to laugh, gazing searchingly at him.

“Don’t you know? He’s an official. . .”

“Ah! yes, my sister told me. . .”

“She told you?” said Várenka, becoming animated.—

“Well, tell me then—will they be married soon?”

“What do you mean by that? Why should they marry?”—asked Ippolít Sergyéevitch disconcerted.

“Why?”—said Várenka, in amazement, with a vivid blush.—“Why, I don’t know. It’s the regulation thing to do! But, oh Lord! Can it be possible that you did not know about that?”

“I know nothing!—” ejaculated Ippolít Sergyéevitch with decision.

“And I have told you!”—she cried, in despair.—“A pretty thing, truly! Please, my dear Ippolít Sergyéevitch, don’t know anything about it now . . . as though I had not said anything!”

“Very well! But permit me; I really do not know anything. I have understood one thing—that my sister is going to marry Mr. Benkóvsky . . . is that it?”

“Well, yes! That is to say, if she herself has not told you that, perhaps it will not take place. You will not tell her about this?”

“I will not tell her, of course!” promised he.—“I came hither to a funeral, and have hit upon a wedding, it seems? That is pleasant!”

“Please don’t say a word about the wedding!—” she entreated him.—“You don’t know anything.”

“That is perfectly true.—What sort of a person is this Mr. Benkóvsky? May I inquire?”

“You may, about him! He’s rather black of complexion, rather sweet, and rather taciturn. He has little eyes, a little mustache, little lips, little hands and a little fiddle.

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He loves tender little songs, and little cheese patties. I always feel like rapping him over his little snout."

"Well, you don't love him!" exclaimed Ippolít Sergyéevitch, feeling sorry for Mr. Benkóvsky at this humiliating description of his exterior.

"And he does not love me! I . . . I can't endure little, sweet, unassuming men. A man ought to be tall, and strong; he ought to talk loudly, his eyes should be large, fiery, and his emotions should be bold, and know no impediments. He should will a thing and do it—that's a man!"

"Apparently, there are no more such!" said Ippolít Sergyéevitch, with a dry laugh, feeling that her ideal of a man was repulsive to him, and irritated him.

"There must be some!" she exclaimed with confidence.

"But Varvára Vasílievna, you have depicted a sort of wild beast! What is there attractive about such a monster?"

"He's not a wild beast at all, but a strong man! Strength—that is what is attractive. The men now-a-days are born with rheumatism, with a cough, with various diseases—is that nice? Would I find it interesting, for example, to have for a husband a gentleman with pimples on his face, like County Chief Kokóvitch? or a pretty little gentleman, like Benkóvsky? Or a round-shouldered, gaunt hop-pole, like court-usher Múkhin? Or Grísha Tchernonéboff, the merchant's son, a fat man, with the asthma, and a bald head, and a red nose? What sort of children could such trashy husbands have? For, you see, one must think of that . . . mustn't one? For the children are a very important consideration! But those men don't think . . . They love nothing. They are good for nothing, and I . . . I would beat my husband if I were married to any of those men!"

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Ippolít Sergyéevitch stopped her, demonstrating that her judgment of men was, in general, incorrect, because she had seen too few people. And the men she had mentioned must not be regarded from the external point of view alone—that was unjust. A man may have an ugly nose, but a fine soul, pimples on his face, but a brilliant mind. He found it tiresome and difficult to enunciate these elementary truths; until his meeting with her, he had so rarely remembered their existence, that now they all appeared to him musty and threadbare. He felt that all this did not suit her, and that she would not accept it.

“There is the river!” she exclaimed joyfully, interrupting his speech.

And Ippolít Sergyéevitch reflected:

“She rejoices, because I am silenced.”

Again they floated along the river, seated facing each other. Várenka took possession of the oars, and rowed hastily, powerfully; the water involuntarily gurgled under the boat, little waves flowed to the shores. Ippolít Sergyéevitch watched the shores moving to meet the boat, and felt exhausted with all he had said and heard during the course of this expedition.

“See, how fast the boat is going!” Várenka said to him.

“Yes,” he replied briefly, without turning his eyes to her. It made no difference even without seeing her, he could picture to himself how seductively her body was bending and her bosom was heaving.

The park came in sight . . . Soon they were walking up its avenue, and the graceful figure of Elizavéta Sergyéevna was coming to meet them, with a significant smile. She held some papers in her hands, and said:

“Well, you *have* had a long walk!”

“Have we been gone long! On the other hand, I have such an appetite, that I—ugh! I could eat you!”

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And Várenka, encircling Elizavéta Sergyéevna's waist, whirled her lightly round her, laughing at the latter's cries.

The dinner was tasteless and tiresome, because Várenka was engrossed with the process of satisfying her hunger, and maintained silence, and Elizavéta Sergyéevna was angry with her brother, who observed the searching glances which she directed at his face, every now and then. Soon after dinner, Várenka drove off homeward, and Ippolít Sergyéevitch went to his room, lay down on the divan, and began to meditate, summing up the impressions of the day. He recalled the most trivial details of the walk, and felt that a turbid sediment was being formed from them, which was eating into his stable equilibrium of mind and feeling. He even felt the physical novelty of his mood, in the shape of a strange weight, which oppressed his heart—as though his blood had coagulated during that time, and was circulating more slowly than was its wont. This resembled fatigue, inclined him to revery, and formed the preface to some desire which had not yet assumed form. And this was disagreeable only because it remained a nameless sensation, despite Ippolít Sergyéevitch's efforts to give it a name.

“I must wait to analyze it, until the fermentation has subsided . . .” he came to the conclusion.

But a feeling of keen dissatisfaction with himself presented itself, and he simultaneously reproached himself for having lost the ability to control his emotions, and for having that day conducted himself in a manner unbecoming a serious man. Alone with himself, he was always firm and stern with himself, more so than when with other people. Accordingly, he now began to scrutinize himself.

Indisputably, that young girl was stupefyingly beautiful,



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but to behold her, and instantly to enter in the dark circle of some troubled sensation or other—was too much for her, and was disgraceful for him, for that was wantonness, a lack of strength of character. She strongly stirred his sensuality,—yes, but he must contend against that.

“Must I?”—suddenly flashed into his head the curt, poignant question.

He frowned, and bore himself toward the question as though it had been put by someone outside of himself. In any case, what was going on within him was not the beginning of a passion for a woman, rather was it a protest of his mind, which had been affronted by the encounter from which he had not emerged as the conqueror, although his opponent had been as weak as a child. He ought to have talked to that girl figuratively, for it was evident that she did not understand a logical argument. His duty was to exterminate her wild conceptions, to destroy all those coarse and stupid fancies, with which her brain was soaked. He must strip her mind of all those errors, purify, empty her soul, and then she would be capable of accepting the truth and of holding it within her.

“Can I do that?”—an irrelevant question again flashed up within him. And again he evaded it. . . . What would she be like, when she had accepted something new, and contrary to what was already in her? And it seemed to him, that when her soul, freed from the captivity of error, should have become permeated with harmonious teaching, foreign to everything obscure and blinding,—that young girl would be doubly beautiful.

When he was called to tea, he had already firmly made up his mind to reconstruct her world, imposing this decision upon himself as a direct obligation. Now he would meet her coldly and composedly, and would impart to his

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intercourse with her a character of stern criticism of everything that she should say, or should do.

"Well, how do you like Várenka?"—inquired his sister, when he emerged on the terrace.

"A very charming girl," he replied, elevating his brows. "Yes? So, that's it. . . I thought you would be struck by her lack of development."

"I really am rather surprised at that side of her,—” he assented.—“But, to speak frankly, she is, in many ways, better than the girls who are developed and who put on airs over that fact.”

"Yes, she is handsome . . . and a desirable bride . . . she has five hundred desyatínas of very fine land, about one hundred of building timber. And, in addition, she will inherit a solid estate from her aunt. And neither estate is mortgaged. . . ."

He perceived that his sister was determined not to understand him, but he did not care to explain to himself why she found this necessary.

"I do not look at her from that point of view,—” said he.

"Do so, then . . . I seriously advise it."

"Thanks."

"You are a little out of temper, apparently?"

"On the contrary. But what of that?"

"Nothing. I want to know it, as an anxious sister."

She smiled prettily, and rather ingratiatingly. That smile reminded him of Mr. Benkóvsky, and he, also, smiled at her.

"What are you laughing at?—" she inquired.

"And you, what are *you* laughing at?"

"I feel merry."

"I feel merry also, although I did not bury my wife two weeks ago,—” he said, with a laugh.

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But she put on a serious face, and sighed, as she said:

"Perhaps, in your soul, you condemn me for lack of feeling toward my deceased husband. You think that I am egotistical? But, Ippolít, you know what my husband was, I wrote to you what my life was like. And I often said to myself:—'My God! and was I created merely for the purpose of pleasing the coarse appetites of Nikolái Stepanovitch Banártzeff, when he has drunk himself into such a state of intoxication that he cannot distinguish his wife from a simple peasant woman, or a woman of the street?'"

"You don't say so!" . . . exclaimed Ippolít Sergyéevitch, recalling her letters, in which she had talked a great deal about her husband's lack of character, his fondness for liquor, his indolence, and of all vices except debauchery.

"Do you doubt it?—" she inquired reproachfully, and sighed.—"Nevertheless, it is a fact. He was often in such a condition. . . . I do not assert that he betrayed me, but I admit it. Could he be conscious, whether I was with him, or some other woman, when he mistook the window for the door? Yes . . . and that was the way I lived for years. . . ." She talked long and tediously to him about her sad life, and he listened and waited for her to tell him the thing that she wished to tell. And it involuntarily occurred to him, that Várenka would never be likely to complain of her life, however it might turn out for her.

"It seems to me that fate ought to reward me for those long years of grief. . . . Perhaps it is near—my recompense. . ."

Elizavéta Sergyéevna paused, and casting an interrogative glance at her brother, she blushed slightly.

"What do you mean to say?"—he inquired, affectionately, bending toward her.

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"You see . . . perhaps I shall . . . marry again!"

"And you will do exactly right! I congratulate you!  
. . . But why are you so disconcerted?"

"Really, I do not know!"

"Who is he?"

"I think I have mentioned him to you . . . Benkóvsky . . . the future procurator . . . and, in the meantime, a poet and dreamer. . . . Perhaps you have come across his verses? He prints them. . . ."

"I do not read verses. Is he a good man? However, of course he is good. . . ."

"I am sufficiently clever not to answer in the affirmative; but I think I may say, without self-delusion, that he is capable of making up to me for the past. He loves me. . . . I have invented a little philosophy for myself . . . perhaps it will seem rather harsh to you."

"Philosophize without fear, that's the fashion at present, . . ." jested Ippolít Sergyéevitch.

"Men and women are two tribes, which are everlastingly at war . . ." said the woman softly, . . . "Confidence, friendship and other feelings of that sort, are hardly possible between me and a man. But love is possible. . . . And love is the victory of the one who loves the least over the one who loves the most. . . . I have been conquered once, and have paid for it . . . now I have won the victory, and shall enjoy the fruits of conquest. . . ."

"It is a tolerably fierce sort of philosophy, . . ." Ippolít Sergyéevitch interrupted her, feeling, with satisfaction, that Várenka could not philosophize in that manner.

"Life has taught it to me. . . . You see, he is four years younger than I am, . . . he has only just finished at the university, . . . I know that that is dangerous for me . . . and, how shall I express it? . . . I should like to

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arrange matters with him in such a way, that my property-right shall not be subjected to any risk."

"Yes . . . so what then?" inquired Ippolít Sergyéevitch, becoming attentive.

"So, you are to advise me as to how this is to be arranged. I do not wish to give him any legal rights over my property . . . and I would not give him any over my person, if that could be avoided."

"It strikes me that that could be effected by a civil marriage. However. . ."

"No, I reject a civil marriage. . ."

He looked at her, and thought, with a feeling of fastidiousness:

"Well, she is wise! If God created men, life re-creates them so easily, that they certainly must have long ago become repulsive to him."

And his sister convincingly explained to him her view of marriage.

"Marriage ought to be a reasonable contract, excluding every risk. That is precisely how I mean to deal with Benkóvsky. But, before taking that step, I should like to clear up the legality of that vexatious brother's claim. Please look over these documents."

"Will you permit me to undertake this matter to-morrow?"—he inquired.

"Of course, when you like."

She continued, for a long time, to set forth her ideas to him, then she told him a great deal about Benkóvsky. Of him she spoke condescendingly, with a smile flitting over her lips, and, for some reason, with her eyes puckered up, Ippolít listened to her, and was amazed at the utter absence in himself of all sympathy for her fate, or interest in her remarks.

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The sun had already set when they parted, he, exhausted by her, to his own room; she, animated by the conversation, with a confident sparkle in her eyes,—to attend to her housekeeping.

When he arrived in his own quarters, Ippolít lighted the lamp, got a book, and tried to read; but with the very first page, he comprehended that it would please him equally well if he closed the book. Stretching himself luxuriously, he closed it, and fidgetted about in his arm-chair, seeking a comfortable attitude, but the chair was hard; then he betook himself to the divan, and lay down on it. At first, he thought of nothing at all; then, with vexation, he remembered, that he would soon be obliged to make the acquaintance of Mr. Benkóvsky, and immediately he smiled, as he recalled the sketch which Várenka had given of that gentleman.

And soon she alone occupied his thoughts and his imagination. Among other things, he thought:

“And what if I were to marry such a charming monster? I think she might prove a very interesting wife . . . if only for the reason that one does not hear from her mouth the cheap wisdom of the popular books. . . .”

But after having surveyed his position, in the character of Várenka's husband, from all sides, he began to laugh, and categorically answered himself:

“Never!”

And after that, he felt sad.

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## II

ON Saturday morning, a little unpleasantness began for Ippolít Sergyéevitch: as he was dressing himself, he had knocked the lamp off of the little table to the floor, it had flown into fragments, and several drops of kerosene from the broken reservoir had fallen into one of his shoes, which he had not yet put on his feet. The shoes, of course, had been cleaned, but it began to seem to Ippolít Sergyéevitch that a repulsive, oily odor was streaming upon the air from the tea, the bread, the butter, and even from the beautifully dressed hair of his sister.

This spoiled his temper.

"Take off the shoe, and set it in the sun, then the kerosene will evaporate,—" his sister advised him.—"And, in the meantime, put on my husband's slippers, there is one pair which is perfectly new."

"Please don't worry. It will soon disappear."

"It is of the greatest importance to wait until it disappears. Really, shall not I order the slippers to be brought?"

"No . . . I don't want them. Throw them away."

"Why? They are nice slippers, of velvet . . . they are fit to use."

He wanted to argue, the kerosene irritated him.

"What will they be good for? You will not wear them."

"Of course I shall not, but Alexander will."

"Who is he?"

"Why, Benkóvsky."

"Aha!—" he gave way to a hard laugh.—"That is very touching fidelity on the part of your dead husband's slippers. And practical."

"You are malicious to-day."

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She looked at him somewhat offended, but very searchingly, and, he, catching that expression in her eyes, thought unpleasantly:

“She certainly imagines that I am irritated by Várenka’s absence.”

“Benkóvsky will arrive in time for dinner, probably,—” she informed him, after a pause.

“I’m very glad to hear it,—” he replied, as he commented to himself:

“She wants me to be amiable toward my future brother-in-law.”

And his irritation was augmented by a feeling of oppressive boredom. But Elizavéta Sergyéevna said, as she carefully spread a thin layer of butter on her bread:

“Practicalness, in my opinion, is a very praiseworthy quality. Especially at the present moment, when impoverishment so oppresses our brethren, who live upon the fruits of the earth. Why should not Benkóvsky wear the slippers of my deceased husband? . . .”

“And his shroud also, if you removed the shroud from him, and have preserved it,”—said Ippolít Sergyéevitch venomously to himself, concentrating his attention upon the operation of transferring the boiled cream from the cream-jug to his glass.

“And, altogether, my husband has left a very extensive and appropriate wardrobe. And Benkóvsky is not spoiled. For you know how many of them there are—three young fellows besides Alexander, and five young girls. And the estate has about ten mortgages on it. You know, I purchased their library, on very advantageous terms;—there are some very valuable things in it. Look it over, and perhaps you will find something you need. . . . Alexander subsists on a very paltry salary.”



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"Have you known him long?—" he asked her;—it was necessary to talk about Benkóvsky, although he did not wish to do so.

"Four years, altogether, and so . . . intimately, seven or eight months. You will see that he is very nice. He is so tender, so easily excited, and something of an idealist, a decadent, I think. However, all the young generation are inclined to decadentism. . . . Some fall on the side of idealism, others on the side of materialism . . . and both sorts seem very clever to me."

"There are men who profess 'scepticism of a hundred horse power,' as one of my comrades has defined it,—"

said Ippolít Sergyéevitch, bending his face over his glass.

She laughed, as she said:

"That is witty, though it is also rather coarse. Really, I am on the verge of scepticism myself, the healthy scepticism, you know, which fetters the wings of all possible impulses, and seems to me indispensable for . . . the acquisition of correct views as to the life of people."

He made haste to finish his tea, and went away, announcing that he had to sort over the books which he had brought with him. But the odor of kerosene lingered still in his chamber, in spite of the open doors. He scowled, and taking a book, he went out into the park. There, in the closely clustered family of ancient trees, wearied with gales and thunderstorms, reigned a melancholy silence, which enervated the mind, and he walked on, without opening his book, down the principal avenue, thinking of nothing, desiring nothing.

Here was the river and the boat. Here he had seen Várenka reflected in the water, and angelically beautiful in that reflection.

"Well, I'm just like a boy from the gymnasium!" he

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cried to himself, conscious that the memory of her was agreeable to him.

After halting for a moment by the side of the river, he stepped into the boat, seated himself in the stern, and began to gaze at that picture in the water, which had been so lovely three days before. It was equally beautiful to-day, but to-day, on its transparent background the white figure of that strange young girl did not make its appearance. Polkánoff lighted a cigarette, and immediately flung it into the water, reflecting that, perhaps, he had done a foolish thing in coming hither. As a matter of fact, of what use was he there? Apparently, only for the sake of preserving his sister's good name, to speak more simply, in order to enable his sister to receive Mr. Benkóvsky into her house, without offending the proprieties. It was not an important rôle. . . . And that Benkóvsky could not be very clever if he really did love Polkánoff's sister, who was, if anything, too clever.

After having sat there for three hours in a semi-meditative condition, his thoughts paralyzed, in a certain way, and gliding over subjects, without sitting in judgment upon them, he rose, and went slowly to the house, angry with himself for the uselessly wasted time, and firmly resolving to set to work as speedily as possible. As he approached the terrace, he beheld a slender young man, in a white blouse, girt with a strap. The young man was standing with his back to the avenue, and was looking at something, as he bent over the table. Ippolít Sergyéevitch slackened his pace, wondering whether this could possibly be Benkóvsky? Then the young man straightened up, with a graceful gesture flung back the long locks of curling hair from his brow, and turned his face toward the avenue.

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“Why, he’s a page of the Middle Ages!” exclaimed Ippolít Sergyéevitch to himself.

Benkóvsky’s face was oval, of a dead-white hue, and appeared jaded, because of the strained gleam of his large, almond-shaped, black eyes, deeply sunken in their orbits. His beautifully formed mouth was shaded by a small, black mustache, and his arched brow by locks of carelessly dishevelled, waving hair. He was small, below middle stature, but his willowy figure, elegantly built, and finely proportioned, concealed this defect. He looked at Ippolít Sergyéevitch as short-sighted persons look, and there was something sympathetic, but sickly, about his pale face. In a velvet beretta and costume, he really would seem like a page who had escaped from a picture representing a court of the Middle Ages.

“Benkóvsky!”—he said, in a low tone, offering his white hand, with the long, slender fingers of a musician, to Ippolít Sergyéevitch, as the latter ascended the steps of the terrace.

The young savant shook his hand cordially.

For a moment, both preserved an awkward silence, then Ippolít Sergyéevitch began to talk about the beauty of the park. The young man answered him briefly, being anxious, evidently, merely to comply with the demands of politeness, and exhibiting no interest whatever in his companion.

Elizavéta Sergyéevna soon made her appearance, in a loose white gown, with black lace on the collar, and girt at the waist with a long, black cord, terminating in tassels. This costume harmonized well with her calm countenance, imparting a majestic expression to its small, but regular features. On her cheeks played a flush of satisfaction, and her cold eyes had an animated look.

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"Dinner will be ready at once,—" she announced.—  
"I am going to treat you to ice-cream. But why are you so bored, Alexander Petróvitch? Yes! You have not forgotten Schubert?"

"I have brought Schubert and the books,—" he replied frankly, and meditatively admiring her.

Ippolít Sergyéevitch observed the expression of his face, and felt awkward, comprehending that this charming young man must have made a vow to himself not to recognize his existence.

"That's fine!"—exclaimed Elizavéta Sergyéevna, smiling at Benkóvsky.—"Shall we play it after dinner?"

"If you like!—" and he bowed his head before her.

This was gracefully done, but, nevertheless, it made Ippolít Sergyéevitch grin inwardly.

"It does please me very much,—" declared his sister coquettishly.

"And are you fond of Schubert?—" inquired Ippolít Sergyéevitch.

"I love Beethoven best of all—he is the Shakspear of music,—" replied Benkóvsky, turning his profile toward him.

Ippolít Sergyéevitch had heard Beethoven called the Shakspear of music before, and the difference between him and Schubert constituted one of those mysteries which did not interest him in the least. But this boy did interest him, and he seriously inquired:

"Why do you place Beethoven, in particular, at the head of all?"

"Because he is more of an idealist than all the other musical composers put together."

"Really? Do you, also, take that as the true view of the world?"

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"Undoubtedly. And I know that you are an extreme materialist,—" explained Benkóvsky, and his eyes gleamed strangely.

"He wants to argue!" thought Ippolít Sergyéevitch,—  
"But he's a nice young fellow, straightforward, and, probably, strictly honorable."

And his sympathy for this idealist, who was condemned to wear the dead man's slippers, increased.

"So, you and I are enemies?"—he inquired, with a smile.

"Gentlemen!"—Elizavéta Sergyéevna called to them from the room.—"Don't forget that you have only just made each other's acquaintance. . ."

Másha, the maid, was setting the table, with a clatter of dishes, and she cast a furtive glance at Benkóvsky with eyes in which sparkled artless rapture. Ippolít also gazed at him, reflecting that he must treat this young fellow with all possible delicacy, and that it would be well to avoid "ideal" conversations with him, because he would, in all probability, get excited to the point of rage in arguments. But Benkóvsky stared at him with a burning glitter in his eyes, and a nervous quiver on his face. . . Evidently, he was passionately anxious to talk, and he restrained his desire with difficulty. Ippolít Sergyéevitch made up his mind to confine himself to the bounds of strictly official courtesy.

His sister, who was already seated at the table, tossed insignificant phrases, in a jesting tone, now to one, now to the other: the men made brief replies—one with the careless familiarity of a relative, the other with the respect of the lover. And all three were seized with a certain feeling of awkwardness and embarrassment, which made them keep watch over one another, and over themselves.

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Másha brought the first course out on the terrace.

"Please come to dinner, gentlemen!"—Elizavéta Sergyéevna invited them, as she armed herself with the soup-ladle.—"Will you have a glass of vódka?"

"Yes, I will!"—said Ippolít Sergyéevitch.

"And I will not, if you will excuse me," declared Benkóvsky.

"I willingly excuse you. But you will drink, will you not?"

"I do not wish to. . ."

"Touch glasses with a materialist,—” thought Ippolít Sergyéevitch.

Either the savory soup with patties, or Ippolít Sergyéevitch's ceremonious manner seemed somewhat to cool and soften the sullen gleam of the young man's black eyes, and when the second course was served he began to talk:

"Perhaps my exclamation, in reply to your question, struck you as a challenge—are we enemies? Perhaps it is impolite, but I assume that people's relations to one another should be free from their official falsehood, which everyone has accepted as the rule."

"I entirely agree with you," answered Ippolít Sergyéevitch, with a smile.—"The more simply, the better. And your straightforward declaration only pleased me, if you will permit me to express myself in that way."

Benkóvsky smiled sadly, as he said:

"We really are enemies in the realm of ideas, but that defines itself at once, of itself. Now, you say—'the more simply, the better,' and I think so too, but I put one construction on those words, while you put another. . . ."

"Do we?"—inquired Ippolít Sergyéevitch.

"Undoubtedly, if you proceed in the straight line of logic from the views set forth in your article."

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"Of course I do. . . ."

"There, you see . . . And from my point of view, your idea of simplicity would be coarse. But let us drop that question. . . . Tell me, in regarding life merely as a mechanism, which has worked out everything, including ideas, do not you feel conscious of an inward chill, and is there not in your soul a single drop of compassion for all the mysterious and enchantingly beautiful, which we degrade to simple chemistry, to a commingling of atoms of material?"

"Hm! . . . I do not feel that chill, for my place is clear to me, in the great mechanism of life, which is more poetical than all fantasies. . . . As for the metaphysical fermentation of sentiment and mind, that, you know, is a matter of taste. So far, no one knows what beauty is. In any case, it is proper to assume that it is a physiological sensation."

One talked in a low tone, full of pensiveness and sorrowful notes of pity for his erring interlocutor; the other spoke calmly, with a consciousness of his mental superiority, and with a desire not to employ words which wounded the vanity of his opponent—words which are so frequent in a discussion between two well-bred men, as to whose truth is the nearer to the real truth. Elizavéta Sergyéevna smiled slightly, as she watched the play of their countenances, and composedly ate her dinner, carefully gnawing the bones of her game. Másha peeped from behind the door, and, evidently, wished to understand what the gentlemen were saying, for her face wore a strained expression, and her eyes had become round, and lost their wonted expression of cunning and amiability.

"You say—actuality, but what is it, when everything around us, and we ourselves are merely chemistry and

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mechanism, working without cessation? Everywhere is motion, and everything is motion, and there is not the hundredth part of a second of rest.—How shall I seize actuality, how shall I recognize it, if I myself, at any given moment, am not what I was, am not what I shall be the following moment? You, I, we—are we merely material? But some day we shall lie beneath the holy pictures, filling the air with the vile stench of corruption. . . . All that will remain of us on earth will be, perhaps, some faded photographs, and they can never tell anyone about the joys and torments of our existence, which has been swallowed up by the unknown. Is it not terrible to believe that all we thinking and suffering beings live only for the purpose of decaying?”

Ippolít Sergyéevitch listened attentively to his speech, and said to himself:

“If you were convinced of the truth of your belief, you would be at ease. But here you are, shouting. And it is not because you are an idealist that you shout, my good fellow, but because you have weak nerves.”

But Benkóvsky, gazing into his face, with flaming eyes, went on:

“You talk about science,—very good!—I bow down before it as before a mighty power which will loose the bonds of the mystery that fetters me. . . . But by the light of it I behold myself on the same spot where stood my distant ancestor, who believed that the thunder rumbles thanks to the prophet Elijah. I do not believe in Elijah; I know that it is caused by the action of electricity, but how is that any clearer than Elijah? In that it is more complicated? It is as inexplicable as motion, and all the other powers, which people are unsuccessfully trying to substitute for one. And it sometimes seems to me, that the



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entire business of science amounts to complicating conceptions—that is all! I think, that it is good to believe; people laugh at me, they say: ‘It is not necessary to believe, but to know.’ I want to know what matter is, and they answer me, literally, thus: ‘Matter is what is contained in that locality of space, in which we render objective the cause of the sensations that we receive.’ Why talk like that? Can that be given out as the answer to the question? It is a sneer at those who are passionately and sincerely seeking an answer to the anxious queries of their spirits. . . . I want to know the aim of existence—that aspiration of my spirit is also ridiculed. But I am living, life is not easy, and it gives me a right to demand a categorical answer from the monopolists of wisdom—why do I live?”

Ippolít Sergyéevitch cast a sidelong glance at the face of Benkóvsky, which was glowing with emotion, and recognized the fact that that young man must be answered with words which should correspond with his own words, in the matter of the strength of stormy feeling injected into them. But, while he recognized this fact, he felt within himself a desire to retort. But the poet’s huge eyes grew still larger, a passionate melancholy burned within them. He sighed, and his white, elegant right hand, fluttered swiftly through the air, now convulsively clenched into a fist and menacing, now as though clutching at something in space, which it was powerless to grasp.

“But, while giving nothing, how much you have taken from life! You reply to that with scorn. . . . But in it rings—what? The impossibility of retorting with confidence, and, in addition, your inability to pity people. For men are asking from you spiritual bread, and you are offering them the stone of negation! You have stolen

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the soul of life, and if there are in it no great feats of love and suffering, you are to blame for that, for, the slaves of reason, you have surrendered your soul into its power, and now it has turned cold, and is dying, ill and poverty-stricken! But life is just as gloomy as ever, and its torments, its woe, demand heroes. . . . Where are they?"

"What a hysterical creature he is!" exclaimed Ippolít Sergyéevitch to himself, as with an unpleasant shiver, he gazed at this little ball of nerves, which was quivering before him with melancholy excitement.—He tried to stem the stormy eloquence of his future brother-in-law, but did not succeed, for, possessed by the inspiration of his protest, the young man heard nothing and, apparently, saw nothing. He must have carried these complaints, which poured forth from his soul, about in him for a long time, and was glad that he could have his say to one of the men who, in his opinion, had ruined life.

Elizavéta Sergyéevna admired him, screwing up her light eyes, and in them burned a spark of sensual desire.

"In all that you have so powerfully and beautifully said,—" began Ippolít Sergyéevitch, in measured and amiable tones, taking advantage of the involuntary pause of the weary orator, and desirous of soothing him,—"in all this there indisputably does ring much true feeling, much searching reason. . . ."

"What can I say to him that is chilling and conciliatory?—" he said to himself, with renewed force, as he wove his web of compliments.

But his sister rescued him from his trying situation. She had already eaten her fill, and sat there, leaning against the back of her chair. Her dark hair was arranged in antique fashion, but this coiffure, in the form of a diadem, was very becoming to the masterful expression of her

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countenance. Her lips, quivering with laughter, displayed a strip of white teeth, as thin as the edge of a knife, and stopping her brother with a graceful gesture, she said:

“Permit me to say a word! I know an apothegm of a certain wise man, and it runs: ‘Those are not in the right who speak—there is the truth, neither are they in the right who reply to them—that is a lie, but only Sabbath and Satan are right, in whose existence I do not believe, but who must exist somewhere, for it is they who have organized life in such a dual form, and it is life which has created them. You do not understand? Yet I am speaking the same human language as you are. But I compress the entire wisdom of the ages into one phrase, in order that you may perceive the nothingness of your wisdom.’”

When she had finished her speech, she asked the men, with an enchantingly brilliant smile:

“What do you think of that?”

Ippolít Sergyéevitch shrugged his shoulders in silence,—his sister’s words perturbed him, but he was delighted that she had curbed Benkóvsky.

But something strange happened with Benkóvsky. When Elizavéta Sergyéevna began to speak, his face flamed with ecstasy, and, paling at every word she uttered, it expressed something akin to terror at the moment, when she put her question. He tried to make her some reply, his lips trembled nervously, but no words proceeded from them. And she, magnificent in her composure, watched the play of his face, and it must have pleased her to behold the effect of her words on him, for satisfaction beamed from her eyes.

“To me, at least, it seems as though the entire sum-

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total of huge folios of philosophy are contained in these words," she said, after a pause.

"You are right, up to a certain point,—” said Ippolít Sergyéevitch, with a wry smile,—“but, at the same time. . . .”

“So, is it possible that a man is bound to quench the last sparks of the Promethean fire which still burn in his soul, ennobling his strivings?—” exclaimed Benkóvsky, gazing sadly at her.

“Why, if they yield anything positive . . . anything agreeable to you!—” she said, with a smile.

“It seems to me that you are taking a very dangerous criterion for the definition of the positive,—” drily remarked her brother.

“Elizavéta Sergyéevna! You are a woman, tell me:—what echoes does the great intellectual movement of woman awaken in your soul?—” inquired Benkóvsky, warming up again.

“It is interesting. . . .”

“Only that?”

“But I think that it . . . how shall I express it to you? . . . that it is the aspiration of the superfluous women. They have remained outside the bulwarks of life, because they are homely, or because they do not recognize the power of their beauty, do not know the taste of power over men. . . . They are superfluous, from a mass of causes! . . . But—ice-cream is a necessity!”

In silence he took the little green dish out of her hands, and setting it in front of him, he began to stare intently at the cold, white mass, nervously rubbing his brow with his hand, which was trembling with suppressed emotion.

“There, you see that philosophy spoils not only the

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taste for life, but even the appetite,—” jested Elizavéta Sergyéevna.

But her brother looked at her and thought, that she was playing an unworthy game with that boy. In him the whole conversation had evoked a dawning sensation of boredom, and, although he pitied Benkóvsky, this pity did not comprise any warmth of heart, and therefore it was devoid of energy.

“*Sic visum Veneri!*”—he decided, as he rose from the table, and lighted a cigarette.

“Shall we play?” Elizavéta Sergyéevna asked Benkóvsky.

And when, in reply to her words, he bent his head submissively, they went from the terrace into the house, whence soon resounded the chords of the piano, and the sounds of a violin being tuned. Ippolít Sergyéevitch sat in a comfortable arm-chair near the railing of the terrace, protected from the sun by a lace-like curtain of wild grapevine, which had climbed from the ground to the roof on cords that had been strung for it, and heard everything which his sister and Benkóvsky said.

“Have you written anything lately?”—inquired Elizavéta Sergyéevna, as she struck the note for the violin.

“Yes, a little piece.”

“Recite it!”

“Really, I do not wish to.”

“Do you want me to entreat you?”

“Do I? No. . . . But I should like to recite the verses which are now composing themselves within me. . . .”

“Pray do!”

“Yes, I will recite them. . . . But they have only

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just presented themselves . . . and you have called them into life. . . .”

“How agreeable it is to me to hear that!”

“I do not know. . . . Perhaps you are speaking with sincerity. . . . I do not know. . . .”

“Really, ought not I to go away?”—thought Ippolít Sergyéevitch. But he was too indolent to move, and he remained, consoling himself with the thought that they must be aware of his presence on the terrace.

“Of thy calm beauty  
The cold gleam doth trouble me . . . .” \*

rang out the low voice of Benkóvsky.

“Wilt thou laugh at my dreams?  
Thou understandest me not, perchance?”

mournfully inquired the youth.

“I’m afraid it’s rather late in the day for you to ask about that,”—thought Ippolít Sergyéevitch, with a sceptical smile.

“In thine eyes there is no happiness,  
In thy words,—cold laughter do I hear.  
And strange to thee is the delirium mad  
Of my soul. . . .”

Benkóvsky paused, from emotion, or from lack of a rhyme.

“But it is so splendid!  
In it is a whirlwind of songs, in it is my life!  
All permeated is it with stormy passion

\* These lines are very irregular, as to both rhyme and rhythm in the original. They are hardly of sufficient merit to warrant a poetical version. — *Translator.*

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To solve the enigma of existence,  
To find for all men the road to happiness. . . ."

"I must go!—" decided Ippolít Sergyéevitch, involuntarily brought to his feet by the young man's hysterical moans, in which simultaneously resounded a touching "farewell!" to the peace of his soul, and a despairing "have mercy!" addressed to the woman.

"Thy slave,—to thee I've raised a throne  
In the madness of my heart . . .  
And I await. . . ."

"Your ruin, for—sic visum Veneri!"—Ippolít Sergyéevitch completed the verse, as he walked down the avenue through the park.

He was astonished at his sister:—she did not seem handsome enough to arouse such love in the young man. She certainly must have effected it by the tactics of opposition. Then, one must acknowledge her steadfast bearing, for Benkóvsky was handsome. . . . Perhaps he, as her brother, and a well-bred man, ought to speak to her about the true character of her relations to this boy, glowing with red-hot passion? But to what could such a conversation lead, now? And he was not enough of an authority on matters of Cupid and Venus to meddle with this affair. . . . But, nevertheless, he must point out to Elizavéta the probable ruin of that gentleman, if he, with her aid, did not succeed in quenching pretty promptly the flame of his transports, and did not learn to feel more normally, and to argue in a more healthy manner.

"And what would happen, if that torch of passion were to flare up before Várenka's heart?"

But, after putting this question to himself, Ippolít Ser-

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gyéevitch did not try to solve it, but began to wonder what the young girl was doing at that particular moment? Perhaps she was slapping her Níkon in the face, or rolling her sick father through the rooms in his arm-chair. And as he represented her to himself engaged in those occupations, he was offended, on her account. Yes, it was indispensably necessary to open the eyes of that girl, to actuality, to acquaint her with the intellectual tendencies of the day. What a pity that she lived so far away, and it was impossible to see her more frequently, so that, day by day, he might shake loose everything which barred off her mind from the action of logic!

The park was full of stillness, and of fragrant coolness, from the house floated the singing sounds of the violin, and the nervous notes of the piano. One after another phrases of sweet entreaty, of tender summons, of stormy ecstasy were showered over the park.

Music poured from heaven also—there the larks were singing. With rumpled plumage, and black as a piece of coal, a starling sat on a linden bough, and bristling up the feathers on his breast, he whistled significantly, staring sidewise at the meditative man, who was strolling slowly along the avenue, with his hands clasped behind his back, and staring far away into the distance, with smiling eyes.

At tea, Benkóvsky was more reserved, and not so much like a crazy man; Elizavéta Sergyéevna, also seemed to be warmed up by something.

On observing this, Ippolít Sergyéevitch felt himself guaranteed against the breaking out of any abstract discussions, and so felt less embarrassed.

“You tell me nothing about St. Petersburg, Ippolít,—” said Elizavéta Sergyéevna.



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“What is there to say about it? It is a very large and lively city . . . The weather is damp there, but. . . .”

“But the people are dry,”—interrupted Benkóvsky.

“Not all of them, by any means. There are many who have grown perfectly soft, and are covered with the mould of very ancient moods; people everywhere are tolerably varied!”

“Thank God that it is so!” exclaimed Benkóvsky.

“Yes, life would be intolerably tedious if it were not so!” assented Elizavéta Sergyéevna.—“But in what favor does the country stand with young people. Are they still speculating on a fall in stocks?”

“Yes, they are becoming somewhat disillusioned.”

“That is a characteristic phenomenon for the educated class of our days,—” said Benkóvsky, with a laugh.—“When the majority of that class were of the nobility, it had no existence. But now-a-days, when the son of every low-born extortioner, merchant or official, who has read two or three popular little books, also belongs to the educated class,—the country cannot arouse the interest of such an ‘intelligéntzia.’\* Do they know anything about it? Can it be for them anything except a good place in which to spend the summer? For them the country is a suburban villa . . . and altogether, they are villa-residents, by virtue of the essential quality of their souls. They make their appearance, live on, and disappear, leaving behind them in life divers papers, bits, scraps—the usual traces of their sojourn, which villa-residents leave behind them in country fields. Others will follow after them and annihilate this rubbish, and with it the memory of the ig-

\*The popular word for the class in question. I leave it untranslated here for the benefit of those who have already met with the word.—*Translator.*

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nominious, soulless and impotent educated people of these years of 1890."

"And are those others repaired noblemen?" asked Ippolít Sergyéevitch.

"You have understood me, apparently, . . . in a way that is far from flattering to you, if you will excuse me for saying so!" Benkóvsky flared up.

"I merely inquired who these coming people are to be?" replied Ippolít Sergyéevitch, shrugging his shoulders.

"They are—the young country! Its reformed generation, men who already possess the developed sentiment of human dignity, who thirst for knowledge, who are of an investigative turn of mind, ready to introduce themselves to notice."

"I welcome them in advance," said Ippolít Sergyéevitch indifferently.

"Yes, it must be confessed, that the country is beginning to produce a new impression on the world,—a conciliatory impression," remarked Elizavéta Sergyéevna. —"I have here some very interesting children,—Iván and Grigóry Shákhoff, who have read almost half of my library, and Akím Sozýreff, a man 'who understands everything,' as he asserts. As a matter of fact, he has brilliant ideas! I put him to the test—I gave him a work on physics, and said to him—'read this, and explain to me the laws of the lever and of equilibrium'; and one week later, he passed my examination with so much effect, that I was simply astounded! And moreover, in reply to my commendations, he said: 'What of that? You understand this, consequently, no one forbids me to do the same—books are written for everybody!' What do you think of that? But you see . . . their idea of their dignity has been de-

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veloped, so far, only to the point of insolence and churlishness. They apply these newly-born properties even to me, but I endure it, and do not complain to the county chief, because I understand what fiery flowers might blossom forth on that soil . . . very likely, some fine morning, one might wake up with nothing but the ashes of one's manor left."

Ippolít Sergyéevitch smiled. Benkóvsky glanced sadly at the woman.

Touching superficially on themes, and not attacking one another's vanity strongly, they conversed until ten o'clock, and then Elizavéta Sergyéevna and Benkóvsky went off again to play, and Ippolít Sergyéevitch bade them good night and retired to his own room, observing that his future brother-in-law made not the slightest effort to conceal the satisfaction he felt at getting rid of his betrothed's brother.

. . . One discovers what he wishes to discover, and ennui makes its appearance, as though by way of reward for an investigative turn of mind. It was precisely this enervating sensation which Ippolít Sergyéevitch experienced, when he seated himself at the table in his chamber, with the intention of writing several letters to his acquaintances. He understood the motives of his sister's peculiar relations toward Benkóvsky, he understood, also, his rôle in her game. All this was not nice, but, at the same time, it was all foreign to him, in a way, and his soul was not disturbed by the parody on the story of Pygmalion and Galatea which was being enacted in his presence, although, in his mind, he condemned his sister. Tapping the handle of his pen, in a melancholy way, against the table, he turned down the light, and when the room was plunged in obscurity, he began to look out of the window.

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Dead silence reigned in the park, which was illuminated by the moon, and through the window-panes, the moon had a greenish hue.

Under the windows, a shadow flitted past, and vanished, leaving behind it a soft sound of rustling branches, quivering at the contact. Stepping to the window, Ippolít Sergyéevitch opened it, and looked out,—beyond the trees glimmered the white gown of Másha, the maid.

“What of that?”—he said to himself, with a smile,—“let the maid love, if the mistress is only playing at love.”

Slowly the days vanished—drops of time in the boundless ocean of eternity—and they were all tediously monotonous. There were hardly any impressions, and it was difficult to work, because the sultry blaze of the sun, the narcotic perfumes of the park, and the pensive, moonlight nights, all aroused meditative indolence in the soul.

Ippolít Sergyéevitch calmly enjoyed this purely-vegetable existence, postponing from day to day his resolve to set to work seriously. Sometimes he felt bored, he reproached himself for his inactivity, his lack of will, but all this did not arouse in him the desire to work, and he explained to himself his indolence as the effort of his organism to amass energy. In the morning, on awaking from a deep, healthy slumber, he noted, as he stretched himself luxuriously, how springy his muscles were, how elastic was his skin, and how deeply and freely his lungs breathed.

The sad habit of philosophizing, which too frequently revealed itself in his sister, irritated him, at first, but he gradually became reconciled to this defect in Elizavéta Sergyéevna, and managed, so cleverly and inoffensively to demonstrate to her the inutility of philosophy, that

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she grew more reticent. Her inclination to argue about everything produced an unpleasant impression on him—he perceived that his sister was arguing, not from a natural impulse to explain to herself her relation to life, but merely from a provident desire to destroy and overthrow everything which might perturb the cold repose of her soul. She had worked out for herself a scheme of practice, but theories only interested her in so far as they were able to smooth over before him her hard, sceptical, and even ironical relations toward life and people. Although Ippolít Sergyéevitch comprehended all this, he did not feel within him the slightest desire to reproach and shame his sister; he condemned her in his own mind, but there was not in it that something which would have permitted him to express aloud his condemnation, for, as a matter of fact, his heart was no warmer than his sister's.

Thus, almost every time, after a visit from Benkóvsky, Ippolít Sergyéevitch promised himself that he would speak to his sister about her relations toward that young man, but he did not keep his promise, imperceptibly to himself refraining from meddling with that affair. For, as yet, no one could tell which would be the suffering side, when sound sense should awaken in that highly inflamed young man. And this would happen—the young man was blazing too violently, and must, infallibly, burn out. And his sister was bearing it firmly in mind, that he was younger than she, so there was no cause for anxiety on her score. But if she got her punishment—what then? That was quite proper, if life is just. . . .

Várenka came frequently. They rowed on the river, together, or in company with his sister, but never with Benkóvsky; they strolled in the forest, and once they drove to a monastery, twenty versts away. The young girl con-

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tinued to please him, and to upset him with her odd remarks, but he always found her society agreeable. Her ingenuousness perplexed him, and restrained the man within him; the integrity of her nature aroused his amazement, but the simple-hearted straightforwardness with which she put aside everything wherewith he attempted to unsettle the peace of her soul, wounded his self-love.

And more and more frequently did he ask himself:

“But is it possible that I have not sufficient energy to drive out of her head all these errors and stupidities?”

When he did not see her, he clearly felt the indispensable necessity of liberating her mind from abnormal paths, he imposed this necessity upon himself as an obligation, but when Várenka made her appearance—he did not exactly forget his resolve, but he never placed it in the foremost rank in his relations toward her. Sometimes he caught himself listening to her, exactly as though he were desirous of learning something from her, and he admitted that there was something about her which hampered the freedom of his mind. It happened, on occasion, that when he had ready prepared a retort which, by stunning her with its clearness and force, would have convinced her of the obviousness of her error,—he locked this retort up within him, as though afraid to utter it. When he caught himself at this, he thought:

“Can this proceed from lack of confidence in my truth?”

And, of course, he convinced himself of the contrary. Another reason why he found it difficult to talk to her was, that she hardly knew even the alphabet of the generally accepted views. It was necessary to begin at the foundations, and her persistent questions: “why?” and “what for?” constantly led him off into the thickets of abstrac-

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tions, where she understood absolutely nothing. One day, worn out with his contradictions, she set forth her philosophy to him in these words:

“God created me, like other people, in His own image and likeness . . . which signifies, that everything I do, I do according to His will, and I live—as He wants me to. . . . Surely, He knows how I live? Well, and that is all there is to be said, and it is useless for you to try to pick a quarrel with me!”

More and more frequently did she irritate in him the glowing sensation of the male, but he kept watch on himself, and with swift efforts, which demanded from him constantly increasing consciousness, he extinguished in himself these flashes of sensuality, he even endeavored to conceal them from himself, and when he could no longer conceal them, he said to himself, with a guilty laugh:

“What of it?—That’s natural . . . considering her beauty . . . But I am a man, and every day my organism is growing stronger under the influence of this sun and air . . . It is natural, but her oddities completely guarantee me against being carried away by her. . . .”

Reason becomes incredibly active and pliable, when man’s feeling requires a mask, behind which to hide the crude truth of his questions. Feeling, like every other power, straightforward and upright, when it is shattered by life, or broken by excessive efforts to restrain its outbursts with the cold bridle of reason, loses both uprightness and straightforwardness, and remains merely crude. And then, being in need of a screen for its weakness and coarseness, it betakes itself for aid to the great capacity which reason possesses of imparting to a lie the physiognomy of the truth. This capacity was well developed in Ippolít Sergyéevitch, and with its aid, he successfully im-

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parted to his attraction toward Várenka the character of interest in her, pure and free from all impulses. He would not have had the strength to love her,—he knew that, but in the depths of his mind there flashed up the hope of possessing her; without himself being aware of it, he expected that she would be captivated by him. And as he argued with himself about everything which did not lower him in his own eyes, he succeeded in concealing within himself everything which might have evoked in him a doubt as to his good breeding. . .

One day, at evening tea, his sister announced to him:

“Do you know—to-morrow is Várenka Ólesoff’s birthday. We must drive over there. I want to have a drive. . . . And it will be good for the horses, too.”

“Do drive over . . . and congratulate her on my behalf,—” he said, feeling that he, also, would like to go.

“But will not you drive with me?—” she inquired, glancing at him, with curiosity.

“I? I don’t know whether I care to. . . . I think I don’t. But I may go, all the same.”

“It is not obligatory!—” remarked Elizavéta Sergyéevna, and dropped her eyelids, to conceal the smile which gleamed in her eyes.

“I know that,—” said he, displeased.

A long pause ensued, during which Ippolít Sergyéevitch remarked to himself, with severity, that he was conducting himself toward that young girl exactly as though he were afraid that his self-control would not resist her charms.

“She told me—that Várenka—that they have a very beautiful site there,—” he said, and turned scarlet, knowing that his sister understood him . . . But she did not betray this in any way—on the contrary, she began to persuade him.



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“Let us go, do, please! You will see, it really is magnificent at their place. And it will be less awkward for me if you are there. . . . We will not stay long, is that right?”

He assented, but his mood was spoiled.

“Why did I find it necessary to lie? What is there disgraceful or unnatural in my wanting to see a pretty young girl once more?—” he asked himself angrily. And he made no reply to these questions.

On the following morning, he awoke early, and the first sounds of the day which his ear caught, were his sister's words:

. . . . “Ippolít will be astonished!”

They were accompanied by a loud laugh—only Várenka could laugh like that. Ippolít Sergyéevitch, sitting up in bed, threw off the sheet, and listened, smiling the while. That which instantaneously invaded him and filled his soul could hardly be called joy, rather was it a foreboding of joy near at hand, which pleasantly titillated the nerves. And springing from his bed, he began to dress himself with a swiftness which confused and perplexed him. What had happened? Could it be that she, on her birthday, had come to invite him and his sister to her house? What a darling girl!

When he entered the dining-room, Várenka dropped her eyes before him with a penitently-comical manner, and without taking the hand which he offered her, she began, in a timid voice:

“I am afraid, that you. . . .”

“Just imagine!—” exclaimed Elizavéta Sergyéevna,—  
“she has run away from home!”

“What do you mean by that?”—her brother asked her.

“On the sly—” explained Várenka.

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“Ha, ha, ha!—” laughed Elizavéta Sergyéevna.

“But . . . why?”—persisted Ippolít.

“I have run away from my suitors, . . .” the young girl confessed, and began to laugh also.—“Imagine, what frightful faces they will make! Aunt Lutchítzky is awfully anxious to drive me into marriage!—she sent them solemn invitations, and cooked and baked as much for them as though I’d had a hundred wooers! And I helped her do it . . . but to-day I woke up, and jumped on my horse—and march! hither. I left them a note to say that I had gone to the Shtcherbákoffs . . . you understand? twenty-three versts away, in exactly the opposite direction!”

He looked at her, and laughed, with a laugh which evoked a pleasing warmth in his breast. Again she was clad in a full, white gown, whose folds fell in tender streams from her shoulders to her feet, enveloping her body in a cloud, as it were. Clear laughter quivered in her eyes, and on her face played an animated flush.

“You do not like it?”—she asked him.

“What?”—he inquired briefly.

“What I have done? It was impolite, I understand that,—” she said, becoming serious, and immediately burst out laughing again. . .

“I can imagine them! All dressed up, scented . . . they’ll get drunk with grief—heavens, how drunk!”

“Are there many of them?”—asked Ippolít Sergyéevitch.

“Four. . .”

“The tea is poured!” announced Elizavéta Sergyéevna.

“You will have to pay for this prank, Várya. . . Have you thought of that?”

“No . . . and I don’t want to!—” she replied with de-

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cision, as she seated herself at the table.—“That will take place—when I return to them . . . that is to say, this evening, for I’m going to spend the day with you. Why should I think from morning on about what will not happen until the evening? And who can do anything to me, and what can they do? Papa? He will growl, but I can go away and not listen to him. . . . Aunt?—she loves me passionately! They, do you think? Why, I can make them crawl round me on all fours . . . ha, ha, ha! That would be . . . ridiculous! I will try . . . Tcheronéboff can’t, because he has a big belly!”

“Várya! You are losing your wits!”—Elizavéta Sergyéevna endeavored to stop her.

“No, I shall not!”—promised the girl through her laughter, but she did not stop soon, and kept on depicting her suitors, and captivating the brother and sister by the genuineness of her animation.

Laughter resounded during the whole time they were drinking tea. Elizavéta Sergyéevna laughed with a tinge of condescension toward Várya. Ippolít Sergyéevitch tried to restrain himself, but could not. After tea, they began to discuss how they should fill up the day which had begun so merrily. Várenka suggested that they should row in the boat, to the forest, and drink tea there, and Ippolít Sergyéevitch immediately agreed with her. But his sister assumed a troubled expression, and announced:

“I cannot take part in that—I must drive to Sánino to-day, and cannot defer it. I had intended to drive to your house, Várya, and turn off there on the way . . . but now it is necessary that I should make the trip expressly. . . .”

Ippolít Sergyéevitch cast a suspicious glance at her—it struck him that she had that moment invented this, for

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the purpose of leaving Vára alone with him. But her face expressed nothing except dissatisfaction and anxiety.

Várenka was grieved by her words, but soon recovered her animation:

“ Well, what of that? So much the worse for you . . . and we’ll go, all the same! Won’t we? To-day I want to go far. . . . Only, see here—can Grigóry and Másha go with us? ”

“ Grigóry can, of course! But Másha . . . who will serve dinner? ”

“ And who will eat the dinner? You are going to the Benkóvskys, we shall not return until evening.”

“ Very well, take Másha also.”

Várenka hurried off somewhere or other. Ippolít Sergyéevitch lighted a cigarette, went out on the terrace, and began to pace up and down it. This expedition charmed him, but Grigóry and Másha seemed to him superfluous. They would embarrass him—there was no doubt about that, and he would not be able to talk freely in their presence.

Half an hour had not elapsed before Ippolít Sergyéevitch and Vára were standing by the boat, while around it bustled Grigóry—a red-haired, blue-eyed young fellow, with freckles on his face, and an aquiline nose. Másha, as she packed the samovár and the various bundles in the boat, said to him:

“ Move quicker, you red-head; don’t you see, the quality are waiting.”

“ Everything will be ready in a minute,” replied the young fellow, in a high tenor voice, as he fastened the rowlocks, and winked at Másha.

Ippolít Sergyéevitch saw it, and divined who it was that had been flitting past his windows by night.

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"Do you know,—" said Vára, as she seated herself in the boat, and indicated Grigóry by a nod,—"he also has the reputation of being a learned man, with us. . . . He's a lawyer."

"You're just talking, Varvára Vasílievna,—" laughed Grigóry, showing his strong white teeth.—"A lawyer!"

"Seriously, Ippolít Sergyéevitch, he knows all the Russian laws. . . ."

"Do you, really, Grigóry?" asked Ippolít Sergyéevitch, with interest.

"The lady is joking . . . the idea! Nobody knows them all, Varvára Vasílievna."

"And how about the person who wrote them?"

"Mr. Speránsky? He died long, long ago. . . ." \*

"Why, do you read?"—inquired Ippolít Sergyéevitch, attentively scanning the intelligent, eagle-like face of the young man, who was lightly tossing the oars into the boat.

"And as for the laws, as she says,—" and Grigóry indicated Vára with his bold eyes.—"The tenth volume of them fell into my hands by accident . . . I looked through it, and saw that it was interesting and necessary. I began to read. . . . And now I have the first volume . . ."

\* The well-known statesman, who influenced Alexander I. between the years 1806 and 1812.—Speránsky, the son of a poor village priest, and socially (though not legally) on the level of the peasants, was educated at an ecclesiastical academy, and became the professor of mathematics and philosophy in the ecclesiastical school of St. Alexander Névsky, in St. Petersburg. Thence his rise was as follows: he became the tutor of a nobleman's children; secretary to the Chancellor of the Imperial Council; Secretary of State. He was an ardent admirer of Napoleon I., as was Alexander I., and to this, no doubt, was due much of his influence over the Emperor. The Code Napoléon was his ideal of legislation, and formed the foundation for a scheme of reforms and laws which he carried into effect, in part. He thereby antagonized all classes of society: the aristocracy were offended by his

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The first article in it is so straight, and says: 'no one,' it says, 'can excuse himself through ignorance of the laws.' Well, so I thought to myself, that nobody does know them, and it isn't necessary for everybody to know them all. . . . And the teacher is soon going to get me the statutes about the peasants;—it's very interesting to read—and see what they are like. . . ."

"You see what he is?"—inquired Várenka.

"And do you read much?"—Ippolít Sergyéevitch pursued his inquiry, as he recalled Gógol's Petrúshka.

"I read, when I have time. There are a great many little books here. . . . Elizavéta Sergyéevna alone must have as many as a thousand. Only, hers are all romances, and various stories. . . ."

The boat floated smoothly against the current, the shores moved to meet it, and all around was intoxicatingly beautiful: bright, still, fragrant. Ippolít Sergyéevitch gazed at Várenka's face, which was turned with curiosity toward the broad-chested rower, while the latter, cutting the mirror-like surface of the river in measured strokes, chatted about his literary tastes, content that the learned gentleman so gladly listened to him. Love and pride

boldness, which they resented in a man of such low extraction, the peasants were enraged by the increase in their taxes; and so forth. He was suddenly sent into polite exile, as the governor of Nízhni Nóvgorod Province, in March, 1812, but was speedily deprived of his office, and subjected to strict surveillance. Later on, for a couple of years, his exile took the form of the governorship of Siberia, whence he returned to St. Petersburg in 1821. But he never recovered his standing or influence. He had been created a Count by Alexander I., and, as the male line of his descendants died out, his descendants in the female line,—the Russian branch of the Princes Kantakiúzin (Cantacuzéne),—petitioned the Emperor. in 1872, for permission to add the title of "Count Speránsky" to their own title, which was granted.

—*Translator.*

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beamed in the eyes of Másha, who was watching them from beneath her drooping lashes.

“I don’t like to read about how the sun sets and rises . . . and, in general, about nature. I have seen those sunrises more than a thousand times, I think. . . . I know all about the woods and the rivers, also; why should I read about them? But that sort of thing is in every book . . . and, in my opinion, it’s entirely superfluous. . . . Everybody understands the sunset after his own fashion. . . . And everybody has his own eyes for that purpose. But about the life of people—that’s interesting. You read, and you say to yourself:—‘and what would you do yourself, if you were placed on that line?’ Although you know that the whole of it is false.”

“What is false?”—asked Ippolít Sergyéevitch.

“Why, the little books. They’re invented. About the peasant, for example. . . . Are they the sort of folks they appear in books? Everybody writes about them compassionately, and makes them out to be such petty fools . . . it isn’t well! Folks read, and think and, as a matter of fact, they can’t understand the peasant . . . because in the books he’s . . . terribly stupid, and bad. . . .”

Várenka must have found these remarks tiresome, for she began to sing, in a low tone, as she gazed at the shores with dimming eyes.

“See here—Ippolít Sergyéevitch, let’s get out and go on foot through the forest. But here we are, sitting and baking in the sun—is that the way to take a pleasure trip? Grigóry and Másha can row on to Savyóloff dell, land there, and prepare tea for us, and meet us. . . . Grigóry, bring the boat to the shore. I’m awfully fond of eating and drinking in the forest, in the air, in the sunshine. . . . One, somehow, feels like a free vagabond. . . .”

“There, you see,” she said, with animation, as she

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sprang from the boat upon the sandy shore,—“you touch earth, and immediately there is something which . . . raises the soul in revolt. Here I’ve got my boots full of sand . . . and have wet one foot in the water. . . . That’s unpleasant and pleasant, that means—it is good, because it makes one feel oneself. . . . Look, how swiftly the boat has moved on!”

The river lay at their feet, and disturbed by the boat, it plashed softly against the shore. The boat flew, like an arrow, in the direction of the forest, leaving behind it a long wake, which glittered like silver in the sunlight. They could see that Grigóry was laughing, as he looked at Másha, while she was threatening him with her fist.

“That’s a pair of lovers,”—remarked Várenka, with a smile;—“Másha has already asked Elizavéta Sergyéevna’s permission to marry Grigóry. But Elizavéta Sergyéevna will not allow it, for the present; she does not like married servants. But Grigóry’s term of service ends in the autumn, and then he’ll take Másha away from you. . . . They’re both splendid people. Grigóry is begging me to sell him a small plot of ground to be paid for in instalments . . . or to let him have it on a long lease . . . he wants ten desyatínas. But I cannot, as long as papa is alive, and it’s a pity . . . I know that he would pay me all, and very punctually . . . he’s a good hand at everything . . . a locksmith, and a blacksmith, and he’s serving at your place as under-coachman. . . . Kokóvitch—the county chief, and my suitor—says this to me about him: ‘that’s a dangerous beast, do you know—he doesn’t respect his superiors!’”

“Who is that Kokóvitch? A Pole?”\*—inquired Ippolít Sergyéevitch, admiring her grimaces.

\* Várenka has mimicked Kokóvitch’s pronunciation, which leads to this question.—*Translator.*



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“A Mordvinian, a Tchuvásh—I don’t know! He has a frightfully long and thick tongue, there isn’t room for it in his mouth, and it interferes with his speech. . . . Ugh! What mud!”

Their path was blocked by a puddle of water covered with green scum, and surrounded by a border of greasy mud. Ippolít Sergyéevitch inspected his feet, remarking:

“We must go around it.”

“Aren’t you going to jump over it? I thought it was already dried up. . . .” exclaimed Várenka, indignantly, stamping her foot. . . . “It is a long way round, and then, I shall tear my gown there. . . . Try to leap across it! It’s easy, see—o-one!”

She sprang, and flung herself forward; it seemed to him that her gown had been torn from her shoulders, and was fluttering through the air. But she stood on the other side of the puddle, and cried, with regret:

“Aï, how I have spattered myself! No, do you go round it . . . fie, how horrid!”

He looked at her, and smiled wanly, catching within him a dark thought which stimulated him, and feeling that his feet were sinking into the sticky dampness. On the other side of the mud, Várenka was shaking her gown, it emitted a soft rustle, and amid its fluttering, Ippolít Sergyéevitch caught sight of dainty, striped stockings on the well-formed little feet. For an instant, it seemed to him as though the mud which separated them from each other, held a sense of warning for him or for her. But he roughly tore himself away, calling this prick in the heart stupid childishness, and hastily stepped aside from the road, into the bushes which bordered it, where, nevertheless, he was obliged to walk through water concealed by the grass. With wet feet, and a resolve which was not yet

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clear to himself, he emerged beside her, and she, showing him her gown, with a grimace, said:

“Look at that—is that nice? Bah!”

He looked—large, black spots smote the eye, as they triumphantly decorated the white material.

“I love, and am accustomed to behold thee so sacredly pure, that even a spot of mud on thy gown would cast a black shadow on my soul . . .” said Ippolít Sergyéevitch slowly, and ceasing, he began to gaze into the astonished face of Várenka with a smile hovering over his lips.

Her eyes rested questioningly on his face, but he felt as though his breast were filling up with burning froth, which was on the point of being converted into wondrous words, such as he had never yet uttered to anyone, for he had never known them until that moment.

“What was that you said?”—inquired Várenka firmly.

He shuddered, for her question sounded stern, and endeavoring to be calm, he began seriously to explain to her:

“I was reciting verses . . . in Russian they sound like prose . . . but you hear that they are verses, do you not? They are Italian verses, I think . . . really, I do not remember. . . . However, perhaps it was prose, from some romance. . . . It just happened to come into my head. . . .”

“How did it go—say it again?” she asked him, suddenly becoming thoughtful.

“I love . . .” he paused, and wiped his brow with his hand.—“Will you believe it? I have forgotten what I said! On my word of honor—I have forgotten!”

“Well . . . let us go on!—” and she moved forward with decision.

For several minutes Ippolít Sergyéevitch tried to understand and explain to himself this strange scene, which

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had placed between him and the young girl a barrier of mutual distrust—tried, and could get nothing out of himself, except a consciousness of awkwardness before Várenka. She walked by his side, in silence, and with bowed head, not looking at him.

“How am I to explain it all to her?” Ippolít Sergyéevitch reflected.

Her silence was crushing; it seemed as though she were thinking of him, and not thinking well of him. And unable to devise any explanation of his outburst, he suddenly remarked, with forced cheerfulness:

“Your suitors ought to know how you are spending your time!”

She glanced at him, as though, by his words, he had called her back from somewhere far away, but gradually, her face changed from seriousness to simplicity, and an expression of childlike sweetness.

“Yes! It would—offend them! But they shall know, oh! they shall know! And, perhaps they . . . will think ill of me!”

“Are you afraid of that?”

“I? Of them?—” she inquired, softly but angrily.

“Pardon me for the question.”

“Never mind. . . . You see, you do not know me . . . you do not know how repulsive they all are to me! Sometimes I feel like hurling them under my feet, and trampling on their faces . . . treading on their lips, so that they could not say anything. Ugh! How detestable they all are!”

Wrath and heartlessness sparkled so clearly in her eyes, that it made him uncomfortable to look at her, and he turned away, saying to her:

“How sad, that you are compelled to live among people

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whom you detest. . . . Can it be, that there is not one among them who would . . . strike you as well-bred. . . .”

“No! You know, there are frightfully few interesting people in the world . . . Everybody is so stupid, so uninspired, so repulsive. . . .”

He smiled at her complaint, and said with a touch of irony, which was incomprehensible even to himself:

“It is early yet for you to talk in that way. But wait a little, and you will meet a man who will satisfy you . . . you will find him interesting in every way. . . .”

“Who is he?”—she asked quickly, and even halted.

“Your future husband.”

“But who is he?”

“How can I know that?—” Ippolít Sergyéevitch shrugged his shoulders, feeling displeased at the animation of her questions.

“But tell me!”—she sighed, and moved on.

They were walking through bushes, which barely reached their shoulders; the road ran through this underbrush, like a lost ribbon, all in capricious curves. Now, in front of them, the dense forest made its appearance.

“And do you wish to marry?”—asked Ippolít Sergyéevitch.

“Yes. . . . I don’t know! I’m not thinking about that . . .” she replied simply. The glance of her beautiful eyes, fixed on the far distance, was as concentrated as though she were recalling something far away and dear to her.

“You ought to spend the winter in town,—there your beauty would attract to you universal attention, and you would soon find what you want. . . . For many would strongly desire to call you their wife,—” he said, slowly, in a low tone, as he thoughtfully scanned her figure.

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“It would be necessary that I should permit that!”

“How can you forbid men to desire it?”

“Ah, yes! Of course . . . let them desire it. . . .”

They walked a few steps in silence.

She, pensively gazing into the distance, still was intent on recalling something, but he, for some reason, was counting the spots of mud on the front of her gown. There were seven of them: three large ones, which resembled stars, two, like commas in shape, and one, like a daub from a brush. By their black color, and their arrangement on the material, they signified something to him. But what—he did not know.

“Have you been in love?”—her voice suddenly rang out, serious and searching.

“I?”—shuddered Ippolít Sergyéevitch.—“Yes . . . only, it was long ago, when I was a young fellow. . . .”

“So have I, long ago,” she informed him.

“Ah . . . who was he?” inquired Polkánoff,\* not conscious of the awkwardness of the question, and tearing off a branch which came under his hand, he flung it far away from himself.

“He? He was a horse-thief . . . Three years have passed since I saw him last, I was seventeen years old then. . . . They caught him one day, beat him, and brought him to our court-yard. He lay there, bound with ropes, and said nothing, but looked at me. . . . I was standing on the porch of the house. I remember, it was such a bright morning—it was early in the morning, and everyone at our house was still asleep. . . .”

\* It must be borne in mind that the surname is not used in Russian speech or novels nearly as often as the Christian name followed by the patronymic, which is more definite as to the precise individual, and the precise member of the family.—*Translator*.

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She paused, buried in her memories.

“Under the cart there was a pool of blood—such a thick pool—and into it fell heavy drops from him. . . . His name was Sáška Rémezoff. The peasants came into the court-yard, and as they looked at him, they growled like dogs. All of them had evil eyes, but he, that Sáška, stared at them all quite calmly. . . . And I felt that he—although he was beaten and bound—considered himself better than all of them. He looked so . . . his eyes were large, and brown. I felt sorry for him, and afraid of him. . . . I went into the house, and poured him out a glass of vódka. . . . Then I went out and gave it to him. But his hands were bound, and he could not drink it . . . and he said to me, raising his head a little—and his head was all covered with blood: ‘Put it in my mouth, my lady.’ I held it to his lips, and he drank so slowly, so slowly, and said: ‘Thank you, my lady! God grant you happiness!’—Then, all at once, I whispered to him: ‘Run!’ But he answered aloud:—‘If I live, I certainly will run. You may trust me for that!’—And I was awfully pleased, that he had said it so loudly, that everyone in the court-yard heard him. Then he said: ‘My lady! Order them to wash my face!’ I told Dúnya, and she washed it . . . although his face remained blue and swollen from the blows . . . yes! They soon carried him away, and when the cart drove out of the court-yard, I looked at him, and he bowed to me, and smiled with his eyes . . . although he was very badly bruised. . . . How I wept for him! How I prayed to God that he might run away. . . .”

“Do you mean . . .” Ippolít Sergyéevitch ironically interrupted her,—“that perhaps you are waiting for him to make his escape and present himself before you, and then . . . you will marry him?”

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She either did not hear or did not understand the irony, for she answered simply:

“ Well, and why should he show himself here? ”

“ But if he did—would you marry him? ”

“ Marry a peasant? . . I don't know . . . no, I think not! ”

Polkánoff waxed angry.

“ You have ruined your brain with your romances, that's what I have to say to you, Varvára Vasílievna . . . ” he remarked severely.

At the sound of his harsh voice, she glanced at his face with amazement, and began, silently and attentively, to listen to his stern, almost castigating words. And he demonstrated to her, how that literature which she loved depraved mind and soul, always distorted reality, was foreign to ennobling ideas, was indifferent to the sad truth of life, to the desires and tortures of mankind. His voice rang out harshly in the silence of the forest which surrounded them, and frequently, in the wayside branches, a timorous rustling resounded—some one was hiding there. From the foliage fragrant twilight peered forth upon the road, now and then, athwart the forest, a prolonged sound was wafted, which resembled a stifled sigh, and the foliage quivered faintly, as in slumber.

“ You must read and respect only those books which teach you to understand the meaning of life, to understand the aspirations of men, and the true motives of their actions. To understand people means,—to pardon them their defects. You must know how badly people live, and how well they might live, if they were only more sensible, and if they paid more respect to the rights of one another. For, of course, all men desire one thing—happiness, but they proceed toward it by different paths, and those paths

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are, sometimes, very ignominious, but that is only because they do not understand in what happiness consists. Hence, it is the duty of all practical and honest literature, to explain to men in what happiness consists, and how to attain to it. But those books which you read, do not occupy themselves with such problems . . . they merely lie, and lie crudely. Here, they have inculcated in you . . . an uncivilized notion of heroism . . . And what is the result? Now you will be seeking in life such people as those in the books. . . .”

“Nó, of course I shall not! . . .” said the young girl seriously.—“I know that there are no such men. But the books are nice precisely for the reason that they depict that which does not exist. The commonplace is everywhere . . . all life is commonplace. . . . There is a great deal said about suffering. . . . That certainly is false, but if it is false—why is it not a good thing to say a great deal about that of which there is so little! Here, you say, that in books one must seek . . . exemplary feelings and thoughts, . . . and that all men err, and do not understand themselves. . . . But, surely, the books are written by men, also! And how am I to know what I ought to believe, and what is best? And in those books, which you assail, there is a great deal that is noble. . . .”

“You have not understood me . . .” he exclaimed, with vexation.

“Really? And you are angry with me for that?—” she asked, in a penitent tone.

“No! Of course, I am not angry . . . as if there could be any question of such a thing!”

“You are angry, I know it, I know it! For, you see, I always get provoked myself, when people do not agree with



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me! But why do you find it necessary that I should agree with you? And I think, also. . . . In general, why does everybody always quarrel and insist that others should agree with them? Then there would be nothing whatever to talk about."

She laughed, and in the midst of her laugh, she concluded:

"It's exactly as though everybody wanted to have only one word left out of all the words—'yes!' It's awfully amusing!"

"You ask, why I find it necessary. . . ."

"No, I understand; you have got used to teaching, so you regard it as indispensable that no one should impede you with objections."

"That's not so at all!—" exclaimed Polkánoff bitterly. —"I wish to arouse in you the faculty of criticising everything that goes on around you, and in your own soul."

"Why?"—she inquired, ingenuously looking him straight in the eye.

"Good heavens! What do you mean by 'why'? In order that you may know how to scrutinize your emotions, your thoughts, your actions . . . in order that you may bear yourself reasonably toward life, toward yourself."

"Well, that must be . . . difficult. To scrutinize oneself, to criticise oneself . . . what for? And how is it to be done? Am I to split myself in two, pray? I don't understand at all! You make it out, that truth is known to you alone. . . . Let us assume that I know some truth, and that everybody else knows some. . . . But, it appears, everyone is mistaken! For you say, that truth is one for all men, don't you? . . . But look—see what a beautiful glade!"

He gazed, and made no reply to her words. Within

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him raged a feeling of dissatisfaction with himself, for his reason had been insulted by this girl, who would not yield to his efforts to subdue her, to bring her thoughts to a halt even for a moment, and then turn her into the right road, directly opposed to the one along which she had been proceeding up to this time, without encountering any opposition. He had become accustomed to regard as stupid those people who did not agree with him; at best, he set them down as devoid of the capacity of development beyond that point, on which their mind already stood,—and toward such people, he always bore himself with disdain, mingled with compassion. But this young girl did not strike him as stupid, and did not arouse in him his customary sentiments toward his opponents. Why was this so, and what was she? And he answered himself: “Undoubtedly merely, because she was so stunningly handsome. . . Her wild speeches might, really, not be regarded as a fault . . . simply because they were original, and originality, on the whole, is rarely met with, especially in women.”

As a man of lofty culture, he outwardly bore himself toward women as beings who were mentally his equals, but in the depths of his own soul, like all men, he thought of women sceptically and with irony. In the heart of man there is much space for faith, but very little for conviction.

They strolled slowly across the broad, almost perfectly circular glade. The road cut across it, in two dark lines of wheel-ruts, and disappeared again in the forest. In the centre of the glade, stood a small clump of graceful young birch-trees, casting lace-like shadows on the blades of the mown grass. Not far away from them, a half-ruined hut, constructed of branches, bowed toward the

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earth; inside it one could catch a glimpse of hay, and on it perched two daws. To Ippolít Sergyéevitch they appeared entirely unnecessary and absurd, in the midst of this tiny, lovely wilderness, surrounded on all sides by the dark walls of the mysteriously mute forest. But the daws cast sidelong glances at the people who were walking along the road, and in their attitude there was a certain fearlessness and confidence,—as though, perched there upon the hut, they were guarding the entrance to it, and were conscious that they were thereby discharging their duty.

“Are not you fatigued?”—inquired Polkánoff, with a feeling akin to anger, as he stared at the daws, pompous and sullen in their immobility.

“I? Fatigued with walking? It is a downright insult to hear that! Moreover, it is not more than one verst further to the place where they are awaiting us . . . we shall enter the forest in a moment, and the road runs down hill.”

She told him how beautiful was the spot which was their goal, and he felt that a soft, agreeable indolence was taking possession of him, which prevented his paying due heed to her remarks.

“It is a pine forest there, and stands on a hillock, and is called Savyóloff’s Crest. The pine-trees are huge, and there are no branches on their boles, except that away up aloft, each one has a dark-green canopy. It is quiet in that forest, even painfully quiet, the ground is all carpeted with pine needles, and the forest seems to have been swept up neatly. When I ramble in it, I always think of God, for some reason or other . . . it must be awe-inspiring like that around His throne . . . and the angels do not sing praises to Him—that is not true! What need

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has He of praises? Does not He know of Himself how great He is?"

A brilliant thought flashed through Ippolít Sergyéevitch's mind:

"What if I were to take advantage of dogma, to plough up the virgin soil of her soul?"

But he instantly, and proudly rejected this involuntary confession of his weakness before her. It would not be honorable to employ a force, in whose existence he did not believe.

"You . . . do not believe in God?"—she inquired, as though divining his thought.

"What makes you think that?"

"Why . . . none of the learned men do believe. . . ."

"None of them, indeed!" he laughed, not caring to talk to her on that subject. But she would not let him off.

"Isn't it true that all are unbelievers? But how is it that they do not believe? Please to tell me about those who do not believe in Him at all. . . . I do not understand how that can be. Whence has all this made its appearance?"

He paused, arousing his mind, which had fallen into a sweet doze beneath the sounds of her voice. Then he began to talk about the origin of the world, as he understood it:

"Mighty, unknown powers are eternally moving, coming into conflict, and their vast movement gives rise to the world which we see, in which the life of thought and of the grass-blade are subjected to the same, identical laws. This movement had no beginning, and will have no end. . . ."

The young girl listened attentively to him, and fre-

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quently asked him to explain one point or another. He explained with pleasure, perceiving the tension of thought in her face. She was thinking, thinking! But when he had finished, she asked him ingenuously, after pausing for a minute:

“So it was not begun from the beginning! But in the beginning was God. How is that? There is simply no mention of Him there, and can that be what is meant by not believing in Him?”

He wanted to retort, but he understood, from the expression of her face, that that was useless at the moment. She was a believer—to that her eyes, which were blazing with mystical fire, bore witness. Softly, timidly, she told him something strange. He did not catch the beginning of her speech.

“When you look at people, and see how hateful everything about them is, and then remember God and the Last Judgment—your heart fairly contracts! Because, assuredly, He can demand an accounting at any time—to-day, to-morrow, an hour hence. . . . And, you know, it sometimes seems to me—that it will be soon! It will be by day . . . and first the sun will be extinguished . . . and then a new flame will flash up, and in it He will appear.”

Ippolít Sergyéevitch listened to her ravings, and said to himself:

“She possesses everything except the one thing which she ought to have. . . .”

Her remarks called forth pallor on her face, and there was terror in her eyes. In this low-spirited condition she walked on for a long time, so that the curiosity with which Ippolít Sergyéevitch had been listening to her, began to die out, and give place to weariness.

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But her delirium suddenly vanished, when a loud laugh was wafted to their ears, as it rang out somewhere in the immediate vicinity.

"Do you hear that? It is Másha . . . We have arrived!"

She hastened her pace, and shouted:

"Másha, á-oo!"

"Why does she shout?" thought Ippolít Sergyéevitch compassionately.

They emerged upon the bank of the river; it sloped down to the water, and on it cheerful clumps of birch-trees and aspens were capriciously scattered. And on the opposite shore, at the very water's edge, stood the lofty, silent pines, filling the air with their heavy, resinous fragrance. There everything was gloomy, motionless, monotonous, and permeated with stern dignity, but on this side—the graceful birch-trees rocked their supple branches to and fro, the silvery foliage of the aspens quivered; the wild snow-ball, and hazel bushes stood in luxuriant masses, reflected in the water; yonder the sand gleamed yellow, sprinkled with reddish pine-needles; here, under their feet, the second growth of grass, barely peeping forth from among the shorn stalks, showed green, and the scent of new-mown hay emanated from the haystacks which had been tossed up under the trees. The river, calm and cold, reflected like a mirror these two worlds, so unlike one to the other.

In the shade of a group of birches a gay-colored rug had been spread, on it stood the samovár, emitting clouds of steam and blue smoke, and beside it, squatting on her heels, Másha was busying herself, teapot in hand. Her face was red and happy, her hair was damp.

"Have you been in bathing?" Várenka asked her.  
"And where is Grigóry?"

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"He has gone to take a bath also. He'll soon be back."

"Well, I don't want him. I want to eat, drink, and . . . eat and drink! That I do! And how about you, Ippolít Sergyéevitch?"

"I shall not refuse, you know,—" he laughed.

"Be quick, Másha!"

"What do you command first? Chicken, the pasty. . ."

"Serve everything at once, and you may disappear! Perhaps someone is waiting for you?"

"Just nobody at all," smiled Másha softly, gazing at her with grateful eyes.

"Well, all right, go on pretending!"

"How simply she says all that," thought Ippolít Sergyéevitch, attacking the chicken.—"Can it be that she is acquainted with the sense and the details of such relations? Very likely, seeing that the country is so frank and coarse in that sphere."

But Várenka, with a laugh, jested away to the confusion of Másha, who stood before her with downcast eyes, and with a smile of happiness on her face.

"Wait, he'll take you in hand!"—she threatened.

"Of co-ourse! And I shall give myself to him! . . . I . . . you know . . . I put him . . ." and covering her face with her apron, she rocked to and fro, in a fit of uncontrollable laughter.—"On the way, I pushed him into the water!"

"Did you! That's a clever girl! And what did he do?"

"He swam after the boat . . . and . . . and he kept beseeching me, to . . . let him . . . into the boat . . . but I . . . flung him . . . a rope, from the stern!"

The infectious laughter of the two women forced Ip-

## Várenka Ólesoff

polít Sergyéevitch to burst into laughter also. He laughed not because he imagined to himself Grigóry swimming after the boat, but because it did him good to laugh. A sensation of freedom from himself pervaded him, and, now and then, he seemed to be surprised at himself from somewhere in the distance, that he had never before been so simply joyous as at that moment. Then Másha vanished, and again they remained alone together.

Várenka half reclined on the rug, and drank tea, while Ippolít Sergyéevitch gazed at her, as through the mist of dreams. Around them reigned stillness, only the samovár hummed a pensive melody, and, from time to time, something rustled in the grass.

“What makes you so taciturn?” inquired Várenka, casting an anxious glance at him. “Perhaps you are bored?”

“No, I’m enjoying myself,” he said slowly, “but I don’t feel like talking.”

“That’s the way I feel, too,” and the girl grew animated,—“when it is still, I don’t like at all to chatter. For with words you cannot say much, because there are feelings for which there are no words at all. And when people say—‘silence,’ it is nonsense:—one cannot speak of silence without destroying it, . . . can one?”

She paused, gazed at the pine forest, and pointing at it with her hand, she said, with a quiet smile:

“See, the pines seem to be listening to something. There, among them, it is still, so still. Sometimes it seems to me that the best way to live is like that, in silence. But it is fine, too, in a thunderstorm . . . akh, how fine! The sky is black, the lightning is vicious, it is dark, the wind roars . . . at such times I feel like going out into the fields, and standing there, and singing—sing-



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ing loudly, or running through the rain, against the wind. It's the same in winter. Do you know, I once got lost in a snow-storm and came near freezing to death."

"Tell me, how that happened," he requested her. He found it pleasant to listen to her,—it seemed as though she were talking in a language which was new to him, although comprehensible.

"I was driving from the town, late at night," she began, moving nearer to him, and fixing her softly-smiling eyes upon his face.—"The coachman was Yákoff, such a stern old peasant. And the snow-storm began, a snow-storm of terrible force, and blew straight in our faces. The wind came in gusts, and hurled a whole cloud of snow on us, so that the horses backed, and Yákoff reeled on the box. Everything around seethed as though in a kettle, and we were in a cold foam. We drove and drove, and then I saw Yákoff take his cap from his head and cross himself. 'What's the matter?'—'Pray, my lady, to the Lord and to Varvára the Great Martyr, she will help against sudden death.' He spoke simply, and without fear, so that I was not frightened: I asked—'Have we lost our way?'—'Yes,' said he.—'But perhaps we shall escape?'—'How are we to escape, in such a blizzard! Now, I'm going to let go of the reins, and perhaps the horses will find the way themselves; but do you call God to mind, all the same!' He is very devout, that Yákoff. The horses halted, and stood still, and the snow drifted over us. How cold it was! The snow cut our faces. Yákoff moved from the box, and sat beside me, so that both of us might be warmer, and we put the rug that was in the sledge over our heads. I sat there and thought: 'Well, I am lost! And I shall not eat the bonbons I have brought from the town. . .' But I was not afraid, because Yákoff kept

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talking all the while. I remember that he said: ‘I’m sorry for you, my lady! \* Why should you perish?—’ ‘Why, you will be frozen also?—’ ‘I’m of no consequence, I’ve lived my life, but here are you . . .’ and he kept on about me. He is very fond of me, he even scolds sometimes, you know, growls at me, he’s so cross-grained:—‘akh, you impious creature, you mad-cap, you shameless weather-cock! . . .’ ”

She assumed a surly mien, and spoke in a deep bass voice, drawling out her words. The memory of Yákov had diverted her from her story, and Ippolít Sergyéevitch was obliged to ask her:

“And how did you find the road?”

“Why, the horses got chilled, and started ahead of their own accord, and they went on, and on until they reached a village thirteen versts away from ours. You know, our village is near here, about four versts distant. If you were to go along the shore, and then by the foot-path, through the forest, to the right, you would come upon a hollow, and our home-farm would be in sight. But by the highway, it is ten versts from here.”

Several saucy birds hovered around them, and perching upon the branches of the bushes, twittered valiantly, as though imparting to one another their impressions concerning these two persons, alone there in the heart of the forest. From afar laughter, talking and the splash of oars was wafted to them,—probably from Grigóry and Másha as they rowed on the river.

\* *Bárynya*, for a married woman of noble birth, *báryshnya*, for an unmarried woman, are more nearly equivalent to “mistress” and “young mistress.” But these are inconvenient, in many instances. In general, they are used precisely as “my lady” is used by English people of the lower class to those of superior rank. — *Translator*.

## Várenka Ólesoff

“Suppose we call them, and go in that direction, among the pines?”—suggested Várenka.

He assented, and placing her hand to her mouth like a trumpet, she began to shout:

“Row thi-is wa-ay!”

Her bosom strained with the cry, and Ippolít Sergyéevitch admired her in silence. He had to think of something—of something very serious, he felt,—but he did not wish to think, and this faint appeal of his mind did not prevent his calmly and freely resigning himself to the more powerful command of his feelings.

The boat came in sight. Grigóry's face was sly and rather guilty; Másha's bore a fictitious expression of anger; but Várenka, as she took her seat in the boat, glanced at them, and laughed, and then they both began to laugh, confused and happy.

“Venus and her petted slaves,” said Ippolít Sergyéevitch to himself.

In the pine forest it was solemn and still as in a temple, and the mighty, stately tree-trunks stood like columns, supporting a heavy vault of dark verdure. A warm, heavy odor of resin filled the air, and under their feet the dry pine-needles crackled softly. In front, behind, on every side, stood the reddish pines, and only here and there, at their roots, through a layer of needles, did a pallid green force its way. In the stillness and in silence the two people strolled slowly amid this dumb life, turning now to the right, now to the left, to avoid trees which barred their path.

“We shall not go astray?”—inquired Ippolít Sergyéevitch.

“I go astray?” said Várenka in surprise.—“I can always, everywhere find the way I require . . . all one has to do is to look at the sun.”

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He did not ask her how the sun pointed out the road to her, he did not, in the least, wish to speak, although he felt, at times, that he might say a very great deal to her. But these were internal impulses of desire, flashing up on the surface of his calm mood, and dying out again in a second, without agitating him. Várenka walked by his side, and on her face he beheld the reflection of quiet ecstasy.

"Is this nice?" she asked him, now and then, and a caressing smile caused her lips to quiver.

"Yes, very," he replied briefly, and again they fell silent, as they roamed through the forest. It seemed to him that he was a young man, devoutly in love, a stranger to sinful intentions, and to all inward conflict with himself. But every time that his eyes fell upon the spots of mud on her gown, a disquieting shadow fell upon his soul. And he did not understand how this happened, that suddenly, all in a moment, when such a shadow enveloped his consciousness, with a deep sigh, as though casting off a weight, he said to her:

"What a beauty you are!"

She looked at him in amazement.

"What ails you? You have held your peace, held your peace—and then, suddenly, you say that!"

Ippolít Sergyéevitch smiled faintly, disarmed by her composure.

"It is so beautiful here . . . you know! The forest is beautiful . . . and you are like a fairy in it . . . or, you are a goddess, and the forest is your temple."

"No," she replied, with a smile, "it is not my forest, it belongs to the Crown, but our forest is yonder, down the river."

And she pointed with her hand somewhere to one side.

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"Is she jesting, or . . . does not she understand?—" said Ippolít Sergyéevitch to himself, and a persistent desire to talk to her about her beauty began to blaze up within him. But she was pensive, calm, and this restrained him during the entire time of their stroll.

They rambled on for a long time, but said little, for the soft, peaceful impressions of that day had breathed into their souls a sweet languor, in which all desires had sunk to rest, except the desire to meditate in silence upon something inexpressible in words.

On their return home, they learned that Elizavéta Sergyéevna had not yet arrived, and they began to drink tea, which Másha hastily prepared. Immediately after tea, Várenka rode off homeward, having exacted from him a promise to come to their manor with Elizavéta Sergyéevna. He saw her off, and as he reached the terrace, he surprised in himself a mournful sensation of having lost something which was indispensable to him. As he sat at the table, whereon still stood his glass of tea, which had grown cold, he sternly tried to bring himself up short, to suppress this whole play of emotions excited by the day, but pity for himself made its appearance, and he rejected all operations on himself.

"Why?" he said to himself—"can all this be serious? It is a frolic, nothing more. It will not hurt her, it cannot hurt her, even if I wished it. It somewhat interferes with my life . . . but there is so much that is young and beautiful about it. . ."

Then, smiling condescendingly to himself, he recalled his firm resolve to develop her mind, and his unsuccessful efforts to do so.

"No, evidently, one must use different words with her. These unadulterated natures are more inclined to yield

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their directness to metaphysics . . . defending themselves against logic by the armor of blind, primitive feeling. . . She is a strange girl!"

His sister found him engrossed in thoughts about her. She made her appearance in noisy, animated mood,—such as he had not beheld her hitherto. After ordering Másha to boil the samovár, she seated herself opposite her brother, and began to tell him about the Benkóvskys.

"Forth from all the cracks of their ancient house peer the cruel eyes of poverty, which is celebrating its victory over that family. In the house, to all appearances, there is not a kopék of money, nor any provisions; they sent to the village to get eggs for dinner. There was no meat at dinner, and so old Benkóvsky talked a great deal about vegetarianism, and about the possibility of the moral regeneration of people on that basis. The whole place reeks of decay, and they are all bad-tempered—from hunger, probably." She had gone to them with the proposition that they should sell her a small plot of land which cut into her estate.

"Why did you do that?" inquired Ippolít Sergyéevitch, with interest.

"Well, you can hardly appreciate the calculations which I am carrying out. Imagine—it is on account of my future children,—" she said, laughing. "Well, and how have you passed the time?"

"Agreeably."

She said nothing, but eyed him askance.

"Excuse me for the question . . . aren't you a little bit afraid of being captivated by Várenka?"

"What is there to fear?" he inquired, with an interest which was incomprehensible to himself.

"The possibility of being strongly carried away?"

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“Well, I am hardly capable of that . . .” he replied sceptically, and he believed that he was speaking the truth.

“And if that is the case, it is very good indeed. A little—that is all well enough, but you are rather cold . . . too serious . . . for your years. And really . . . I shall be glad if she stirs you up a little. . . . Perhaps you would like to see her more frequently? . . .”

“She made me promise to go to their house, and begged you to do so . . .” Ippolít Sergyéevitch informed her.

“When do you wish to go?”

“It makes no difference to me. . . . Whenever you find it convenient. You are in good spirits to-day. . . .”

“Is that very noticeable?”—she laughed.—“What of it? I have passed the day pleasantly. On the whole . . . I am afraid it will seem cynical to you . . . but the truth is, that since the day of my husband’s funeral, I feel that I am reviving to new life . . . I am egotistical—of course! But it is the joyous egotism of a person who has been released from prison to freedom. . . . Condemn me . . . but be just.”

“How many accusations for such a short speech! You are glad and . . . go on being glad . . .” laughed Ippolít Sergyéevitch amiably.

“And you are kind and charming to-day,” said she.—“You see—a little happiness—and a person immediately becomes better, kinder. But some over-wise people think that sufferings purify us . . . I should like to have life, by applying that theory to them, purify their minds from error. . . .”

“But if you were to make Várenka suffer—what would become of her?” Ippolít Sergyéevitch asked himself.

They soon parted. She began to play, and he, going off to his own room, lay down on his couch and began to re-

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flect,—what sort of an idea of him had that young girl formed? Did she consider him handsome? Or clever? What was there about him that could please her? Something attracted her to him—that was evident to him. But it was not likely that he possessed in her eyes any value as a clever, learned man; she so lightly brushed aside all his theories, views, exhortations. It was more probable that he pleased her simply as a man.

And on arriving at this conclusion, Ippolít Sergyéevitch flushed with proud joy. Closing his eyes, with a smile of satisfaction, he pictured to himself this girl as submissive to him, conquered by him, ready to do anything for him, timidly entreating him to take her, and teach her to think, to live, to love.

### III.

WHEN Elizavéta Sergyéevna's cabriolet stopped at the porch of Colonel Ólesoff's house, the tall, thin figure of a woman in a loose gray gown made its appearance, and a bass voice rang out, with a strong burr on the letter "r":

"A-ah! What a pleasant surprise!"

Ippolít Sergyéevitch even shivered at this greeting, which resembled a bellow.

"My brother Ippolít . ." Elizavéta Sergyéevna introduced him, after she and the woman had kissed each other.

"Margaríta Rodiónovna Lutchítzky."

Five cold, sticky bones pressed Ippolít Sergyéevitch's fingers; flashing gray eyes were riveted on his face, and Aunt Lutchítzky boomed away in her bass voice, distinctly enunciating every phrase, as though she were counting them, and were afraid of saying too much.



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"I am very glad to make your acquaintance. ."

Then she moved to one side, and laid her hand on the house-door.

"Pray, come in!"

Ippolít Sergyéevitch stepped across the threshold, and a hoarse cough and an irritated exclamation were borne to meet him from some quarter:

"Devil take your stupidity! Go along, see, and tell me, who-o has come. . ."

"Go in, go in, Elizavéta Sergyéevna," urged on her brother, perceiving that he had halted, hesitatingly.—"It's the colonel shouting. . . It is we who have come, colonel!"

In the middle of a large room with a low ceiling, stood a massive arm-chair, and in it was squeezed a big, lymphatic body, with a red, wizened face, overgrown with gray moss. The upper part of this mass turned heavily, emitting a choking snort. Behind the arm-chair rose the shoulders of a tall, stout woman, who gazed into Ippolít Sergyéevitch's face with lack-lustre eyes.

"I'm glad to see you . . . is this your brother? . . Colonel Vasíly Ólesoff . . he beat the Turks and the Tekke Turkomans, and now he himself is conquered by diseases . . . ho, ho, ho! I'm glad to see you. Varvára has been drumming in my ears all summer about your learning, and all the rest of it. . . Pray, come hither, into the drawing-room. . . Thékla, push me in!"

The wheels of the chair squeaked piercingly, the colonel lurched forward, threw himself back, and broke into a hoarse cough, wagging his head about as though he wanted it to break off.

"When your master coughs—stand still! Haven't I told you that a thousand times?"

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And Aunt Lutchitzky, seizing Thékla by the shoulder, crushed her down to the floor.

The Polkánoffs stood and waited, until the heavily swaying body of Ólesoff should have finished coughing.

At last they moved forward, and found themselves in a small room, where it was suffocating, dark and cramped with a superabundance of softly-stuffed furniture in canvas covers.

“Pray seat yourselves . . . Thékla,—call your young mistress!” commanded Aunt Lutchitzky.

“Elizavéta Sergyéevna, my dear, I am glad to see you!” announced the colonel, staring at his guest from beneath his gray eyebrows which met over his nose, with eyes as round as those of an owl. The colonel’s nose was comically huge, and its tip, purple and shining, mournfully hid itself in the thick brush of his whiskers.

“I know that you are as glad to see me as I am to see you, . . .” said his visitor caressingly.

“Ho, ho, ho! That’s a lie—begging your pardon! What pleasure is there in seeing an old man, crippled with gout, and sick with an inexorable thirst for vódka? Twenty-five years ago, one might really have rejoiced at the sight of Vaska Ólesoff . . . and many women did rejoice . . . but now, I’m utterly useless to you, and you’re utterly useless to me. . . . But when you are here, they give me vódka—and so, I’m glad to see you!”

“Don’t talk much, or you’ll begin to cough again. . . .” Margaríta Rodiónovna warned him.

“Did you hear?—” the colonel turned to Ippolít Sergyéevitch.—“I must not talk—it’s injurious, I must not drink, it’s injurious,—I must not eat as much as I want,—it’s injurious! Everything is injurious, devil take it! And I see, that it’s injurious for me to live! Ho, ho, ho! I

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have lived too long. . . I hope you may never have occasion to say the same thing about yourself. . . However, you will certainly die early, you'll get the consumption,—you have an impossibly narrow chest. . .”

Ippolít Sergyéevitch looked, now at him, now at Aunt Lutchítzky, and thought of Várenka:

“And what monsters she lives among!”

He had never tried to depict to himself the setting of her life, and now he was crushed by what he beheld. The harsh, angular leanness of Aunt Lutchítzky offended his eyes; he could not bear to look at her long neck, covered with yellow skin, and every time she spoke he began to be apprehensive of something, as though in anticipation that the bass sounds, which emanated from this woman's broad bosom, flat as a board, would rend her breast. And the rustle of Aunt Lutchítzky's skirts seemed to him to be her bones rubbing against each other. The colonel reeked with some sort of liquor, sweat, and vile tobacco. Judging from the gleam in his eyes, he must often be in a fury, and Ippolít Sergyéevitch, as he imagined him in a state of exasperation, felt loathing for the old man. The rooms were not comfortable, the wall-paper was smoke-begrimed, and the tiles of the stoves were streaked with cracks, which, however, made them look like marble. The paint had been rubbed off of the floors by the wheels of the rolling-chair, the window-frames were awry, the panes were dull, everything breathed forth an odor of age, perishing with exhaustion.

“It is sultry to-day, . . .” remarked Elizavéta Sergyéevna.

“There will be rain,” declared Mrs. Lutchítzky categorically.

“Really?” said the visitor doubtfully.

## Várenka Ólesoff

“Trust to Margaríta,—” said the old man hoarsely.—  
“She knows everything that will take place. . . . She assures me so every day. . . . ‘You will die,’ she says, ‘and they will rob Várya, and break her head . . . —you see? I dispute it:—the daughter of Colonel Ólesoff will not permit anyone to turn her head . . . she’ll do it herself; and that I shall die—is true . . . that is to say, it is as it should be. And you, my learned gentleman, how do you feel yourself? A very small fish in a big tank?”

“No, why should I? It is a beautiful wooded country . . .” replied Ippolít Sergyéevitch courteously.

“It is a beautiful wooded country here? Phew! That means that you haven’t seen anything beautiful on earth. The valley of Kazanlík in Bulgaria is beautiful, . . . it is beautiful in Kherassan . . . on the Murgal river there is a spot like paradise itself . . . Ah! My precious child! . . .”

Várenka brought with her an aroma of freshness into the musty atmosphere of the drawing-room. Her form was enveloped in some sort of mantle, of light lilac *sarpínka*.\* In her hands she held a huge bouquet of freshly-gathered flowers, and her face was beaming with pleasure.

“How nice that you have come to-day!—” she exclaimed, as she greeted her guests.—“I was just preparing to go to you . . . they have been nagging me!”

And with a sweeping gesture, she designated her father and Margaríta Rodiónovna, who was sitting beside her visitor with such unnatural rigidity, that her backbone seemed to have turned to stone, and to be incapable of bending.

\* *Sarpínka* is a very fine cotton goods, manufactured by German colonists, in the Government of Sarátoff, on the lower Vólga. It is almost invariably of two colors, like shot silk, is very durable and pretty.—*Translator*.

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"Varvára! You're talking nonsense!" she cried sternly to the young girl, with flashing eyes.

"Don't scream! If you do, I'll tell about Lieutenant Yákovleff, and his fiery heart. . . ."

"Ho, ho, ho! Várka\*—be quiet! I'll tell it myself. . . ."

"What sort of a place have I got into?"—meditated Ippolít Sergyéevitch, gazing at his sister in amazement.

But, evidently, all this was familiar to her, and although a smile of disdain quivered on the corners of her mouth, she looked on and listened with composure.

"I will go and see about tea!"—announced Margaríta Rodiónovna, stretching herself upward, without bending her body, and disappeared, after casting a glance of reproach at the colonel.

Várenka sat down in her aunt's place, and began to whisper something in Elizavéta Sergyéevna's ear.

"Why has she such a passion for loose garments!" said Ippolít Sergyéevitch to himself, casting a furtive glance at her figure, as it bent toward his sister, in a fine pose.

But the colonel rumbled away, like a cracked double-bass:

"Of course, you are aware, that Margaríta is the wife of my comrade, Lieutenant-Colonel Lutchítzky, who was killed at Iski-Zagra. She made the campaign with him, that she did! She's an energetic woman, you know. Well, and in our regiment there was a Lieutenant Yákovleff . . . such a delicate young lady he was . . . his chest was crushed by a Turkish volunteer, and consumption ensued, so that was the end of him! Well, and when he fell ill, she nursed him for five months! What do you think

\* Vára, Várenka, Várka, are all diminutives of Varvára.—*Translator.*

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of that? hey? And, do you know, she gave him her word that she would not marry. She was young, and handsome . . . a very striking woman. Very worthy men courted her, courted her seriously—Captain Shmurló, a very fine young Little Russian, even took to drink and left the service. I, also . . . that is to say, I also proposed to her:—‘Margaríta! marry me!’ . . . She would not . . . it was very stupid of her, but noble, of course. And then, when I was seized with the gout, she presented herself, and said: ‘You are alone in the world, I am alone . . .’ and so forth and so on. Touching and saintly. Eternal friendship, and we snarl at each other all the time. She comes here every summer, she even wants to sell her estate and settle down here forever, that is to say, until I die. I appreciate it—but it’s all ridiculous, isn’t it? Ho, ho, ho! For she was a passionate woman, and you see how he has dried her up? Don’t play with fire . . . ho! She flies into a rage, you know, when one narrates this poetry of her life, as she expresses it. ‘Don’t you dare,’ says she, ‘to insult the holy things of my heart with your abominable tongue!’ Ah! Ho, ho, ho! But, as a matter of fact, what sort of a holy thing is it? A delusion of the mind . . . the dreams of a school-girl . . . Life is simple, isn’t it? Enjoy yourself, and die when your time comes, that’s the whole philosophy! But . . . die when your time comes! But here now, I have overlived the right time, I hope you won’t do that. . . .”

Ippolít Sergyéevitch’s head was reeling with the story, and the odor which emanated from the colonel. But Várenka, paying no heed whatever to him, and, probably, not comprehending how little agreeable the conversation with her father was to him, was chatting, in a low tone, with Elizavéta Sergyéevna, listening seriously and attentively to her.

## Várenka Ólesoff

"I invite you to drink tea!—" Margaríta Rodiónovna's bass voice rang out in the doorway.—"Varvára, wheel your father!"

Ippolít Sergyéevitch drew a breath of relief and followed Várenka, who lightly pushed in front of her the heavy chair.

Tea was prepared in the English fashion, with a mass of cold viands. A huge rare piece of roast beef was flanked by bottles of wine, and this evoked a laugh of contentment on the part of the colonel. It seemed as though even his half-dead legs, enveloped in bear-skin, quivered with the anticipation of pleasure. He was rolled up to the table, and stretching out his fat, trembling hands, overgrown with dark hair, toward the bottles, he laughed aloud, shaking the air of the great dining-room, set around with chairs plaited from osier twigs.

The tea-drinking lasted a torturingly long time, and throughout it the colonel narrated military anecdotes, in a hoarse voice, Margaríta Rodiónovna interposed brief remarks in her bass, and Várenka chatted softly but vivaciously with Elizavéta Sergyéevna.

"What is she talking about?"—thought Ippolít Sergyéevitch sadly, delivered over to the colonel as a victim.

It seemed to him that she was paying too little attention to him to-day. Was this coquetry? And he felt that he was on the point of becoming angry with her. But now she cast a glance in his direction, and uttered a ringing laugh.

"My sister has called her attention to me!" reflected Ippolít Sergyéevitch, frowning with displeasure.

"Ippolít Sergyéevitch! Have you finished your tea?" inquired Várenka.

"Yes, long ago. . ."

## Várenka Ólesoff

“Would you like to take a stroll? I will show you some splendid places!”

“Let us go. And will you come too, Líza?”

“No! I find it pleasant to sit with Margaríta Rodiónovna and the Colonel.”

“Ho, ho, ho! Agreeable to stand on the brink of the grave, into which my half-dead body is rolling!” and the colonel roared with laughter. “Why do you say that?”

“The next thing, she will be asking me—‘don’t you find it tiresome at our house?’—” thought Ippolít Sergyéevitch, as he emerged with Várenka from the house into the garden. But she asked him:

“How do you like papa?”

“Oh!”—exclaimed Ippolít Sergyéevitch softly. “He inspires respect!”

“Aha!” replied Várenka, with satisfaction.—“That’s what everybody says. He’s frightfully brave! You know, he does not talk about himself, but Aunt Lutchítzky was in the same regiment with him, and she said that at Górný Dubnyák a ball crushed his horse’s nostrils, and the animal carried him straight in among the Turks. But the Turks pursued him; he managed to wheel and gallop along their line; of course, they killed the horse; he fell, and saw that four men were running toward him. . . One rushed up, and brandished the butt-end of a rifle over him, but papa let fly,—whack! and the man fell at his feet. He discharged a revolver straight in his face—bang! And then he pulled his leg out from under the horse, and the other three rushed up, and more after them, and our own soldiers flew to meet them, with Yákovleff . . . you know who he was? . . . Papa seized the dead man’s rifle, sprang to his feet—and forward! But he was awfully strong, and that came near ruining him; he hit the Turk



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over the head, and the gun broke, and he had nothing but his sword left, but it was bad and dull, and a Turk was trying to kill him with a bayonet-thrust in the breast. Then papa grasped the strap of the rifle in his hand, and ran to meet his own men, dragging the Turk after him. He understood that he was lost, turned his face toward the foe, wrenched the gun away from the Turk, and dashed at them—hurrah! Then Yákovleff rushed up with the soldiers, and they set to work so heartily, that the Turks beat a retreat. They gave papa the George \* for that, but he flew into a rage, because they did not give the George to a non-commissioned officer of his regiment, who had saved Yákovleff twice and papa once in that fight, and refused the cross. But when they gave it to the non-commissioned officer, then he took it.”

“You tell about that fight exactly as though you had taken part in it . . .” remarked Ippolít Sergyéevitch, interrupting her narration.

“Ye-es . . .” she said slowly, sighing and puckering up her eyes.—“I like war. . . And I’m going, as a Sister of Mercy, if they begin to fight. . .”

“Then I shall go as a soldier. . .”

“You?” she inquired, scanning his figure.—“Come, you are jesting, . . you would make a poor soldier . . you are so weak, so thin. . .”

This stung him.

“I am strong enough, I assure you . . .” he declared, as though warning her.

\* The Order of St. George—the most prized of Russian Orders, because it must be won by desperate, personal valor, on the field of battle. The names of the members are inscribed in gold on the white marble walls of the grand Hall of St. George, in the Great Palace, in the Krémelin, at Moscow. The ribbon is orange and black.—*Translator.*

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“Well, you don’t say so?” said Várenka composedly, not believing him.

A raging desire to seize her in his arms, and crush her to his breast with all his might flamed up within him—to crush her so that the tears would gush forth from her eyes. He cast a hasty glance around, twitched his shoulders, and immediately felt ashamed of his impulse.

They walked through the garden along a path set with regular rows of apple-trees, and behind them, at the end of the path, gazed forth the windows of the house. Apples kept falling from the trees, striking the earth dully, and voices resounded somewhere close at hand. One asked:

“I suppose he has come wooing too?”

But the other swore gruffly.

“Wait . . .” Várenka stopped her companion, grasping his sleeve, “let’s hear what they have to say about us. . .”

He cast a harsh glance at her, and said:

“I am not fond of eavesdropping to the gossip of servants. . .”

“But I love it . . .” declared Várenka, “when they are by themselves, they always talk very interestingly about us, their masters. . .”

“It may be interesting, but it is not nice . . .” laughed Ippolít Sergyéevitch.

“Why not? They always speak well of me.”

“I congratulate you. . .”

He was the prey of a malicious impulse to speak sharply, rudely to her, to wound her. To-day her conduct agitated him:—yonder, in the house, she had paid no attention to him for a long time, just as though she did not understand that he had come for her sake, and to see her, and

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not to see her crippled father, and dried-up aunt. Then, when she pronounced him a weakling, she had begun to look upon him with a certain condescension.

"What is the meaning of all this?" he said to himself. —"If my exterior does not please her, and I am not interesting from the internal point of view—what has attracted her to me? A new face—and nothing more?"

He believed that she was gravitating toward him, and thought that he had to deal with coquetry under the guise of ingenuousness and artlessness.

"Perhaps she considers me stupid . . . and hopes that I shall grow wiser. . . ."

"My aunt is right . . . it is going to rain!" said Várenka, gazing into the distance,—“see, what a dark cloud . . . and it is growing sultry, as it always does before a thunder-storm. . . ."

"That is unpleasant . . ." said Ippolít Sergyéevitch. "We must turn back, and warn my sister. . ."

"Why?"

"That we may return home before it begins to rain. . ."

"Who is going to let you go? And you would not be able to get there before the thunder-storm begins. . . . You will have to wait here."

"And what if the rain should last until night?"

"You will spend the night with us," said Várenka categorically.

"No, that is inconvenient. . . ." protested Ippolít Sergyéevitch.

"Oh Lord! Is it so difficult to spend one night inconveniently?"

"I had not my own comfort in view. . ."

"Then don't worry yourself about other people—each person can take care of himself."

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They disputed and walked on, but the dark cloud swept swiftly to meet them across the sky, and already the thunder was beginning to rumble somewhere far away. An oppressive sultriness permeated the atmosphere, as though the approaching thunder-cloud, condensing all the burning heat of the day, were driving it before it. And the leaves on the trees grew still, in eager expectation of the refreshing moisture.

“Shall we turn back?” suggested Ippolít Sergyéevitch.

“Yes, because it is stifling . . . How I detest the time before something is coming . . . before a thunder-storm, before holidays. The thunder-storm or the holiday is all well enough in itself, but it is tiresome to wait for it. If everything could only be done at once . . . you could lie down and sleep—it is winter, and cold; you wake—and it is spring, with flowers and sun . . . or, the sun is shining, and, all at once, there is darkness, thunder, a downpour. . .”

“Perhaps you would like to have a man also change as suddenly and unexpectedly?” inquired Ippolít Sergyéevitch, with a laugh.

“A man should always be interesting . . .” she said, sententiously.

“But what do you mean by being interesting?”—exclaimed Ippolít Sergyéevitch, with vexation.

“What do I mean? Why . . . it is difficult to say . . . I think that all people would be interesting, if they were more . . . lively . . . yes, more lively! If they laughed, sang, played more . . . if they were more daring, stronger . . . even audacious . . . even coarse. . .”

He listened attentively to her definitions, and asked himself:

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"Is she recommending to me the programme of the relations which she wishes me to bear toward her? . . ."

"There's no swiftness in people . . . and everything ought to be done swiftly, in order that life should be interesting . . . ." she explained, with a serious face.

"Who knows? Perhaps you are right . . ." remarked Ippolít Sergyéevitch softly. "That is to say, not entirely right. . . ."

"Don't excuse yourself!—" she laughed.—"Why not entirely? It's either entirely right or not right at all . . . it's either good or bad . . . either handsome or homely . . . that's the way to argue! But people say: 'she's quite nice, quite pretty . . . ' and it's simply out of cowardice that they speak in that way . . . they're afraid of the truth, for some reason or other!"

"Well, you know, that by just this division into two, you insult far too many!"

"How so?"

"By injustice. . . ."

"A man always keeps coming back to that same justice! Just as though all life were contained in it and one couldn't possibly get along without it. But who wants it?"

She cried out angrily and capriciously, and her eyes kept contracting and emitting sparks.

"Everyone, Várvara Vasílievna! Everyone, from the peasant . . . to yourself. . . ." said Ippolít Sergyéevitch didactically, as he watched her agitation, and tried to explain it to himself.

"I don't want any justice!"—she rejected it with decision, and even made a gesture with her hand, as though she were repelling something.—"And if I do need it, I'll find it for myself. . . . Why are you forever bothering yourself about people? And . . . you simply say that,

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in order to make me angry . . . because to-day you are consequential, and pompous. . . .”

“I? I make you angry? Why?” said Ippolít Sergyéevitch, in amazement.

“How should I know? Because you are bored, probably . . . But . . . you’d better stop it! I’m loaded to the muzzle . . . even without your interference! They have been feeding me on sermons the whole week, all because of my suitors . . . they have flooded me with every sort of venom . . . and vile suspicions . . . thanks to you!”

Her eyes flashed with a phosphorescent gleam, her nostrils quivered, and she trembled all over with the agitation which had suddenly seized upon her. Ippolít Sergyéevitch, with a mist in his eyes, and a rapid beating of the heart, began hotly to defend her against herself.

“I did not mean to anger you. . . .”

But, at that moment, the thunder crashed noisily over their heads—as though some monstrously-large and coarsely-good-natured person were laughing. Stunned by the terrific sound, they both shuddered, and halted, for an instant, but immediately set out, at a rapid pace, for the house. The foliage trembled on the trees, and a shadow fell upon the earth from the thunder-cloud, which spread over the sky in a soft, velvety canopy.

“But what a quarrel you and I have had!” said Várenka on the way.—“I did not notice how the cloud was creeping up.”

On the porch of the house stood Elizavéta Sergyéevna, and Aunt Lutchítzky, with a large straw hat on her head, which made her look like a sunflower.

“There is going to be a terrific thunder-storm,” she announced, in her impressive bass voice, straight in Ip-

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polít Sergyéevitch's face, as though she considered it her plain duty to assure him of the approach of the tempest. Then she said:

"The colonel has fallen asleep . . ." and vanished.

"How does this please you?" asked Elizavéta Sergyéevna, indicating the sky with a nod.—"I think we shall be obliged to spend the night here."

"If we do not incommode anyone. . ."

"That's just like a man!"—exclaimed Várenka staring at him with amazement, and almost with pity.—"You're always afraid of inconveniencing people, of being unjust. . . akh, oh Lord! Well, and you must find it tiresome to live . . . always on pins and needles! The way I think about it is—if you want to inconvenience people, do it, if you want to be unjust, be unjust! . . ."

"And God Himself will decide who is in the right," interposed Elizavéta Sergyéevna, smiling at her with a consciousness of her own superiority.—"I think I must hide myself under the roof . . . What are you going to do?"

"We will watch the thunder-storm here,—won't we?" the girl asked, addressing Ippolít Sergyéevitch.

He expressed his assent by a bow.

"Well, I am not fond of the grandiose phenomena of Nature . . . if they are likely to produce fever or a cold in the head. Moreover, one can enjoy a thunder-storm through the window-panes. . . aĩ!"

The lightning flashed; the gloom, rent by it, quivered, for a moment revealing what it had engulfed, and then flowed together again. For a couple of seconds, a crushing silence reigned, then the thunder roared, like the discharge of a battery, and its rumblings rolled over the house. The wind burst forth, and seizing the dust and

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rubbish on the ground, and whirled around with everything it had gathered, rising upward in a column. Straws, bits of paper, leaves flew about; the martins clove the air with frightened squeaks, the foliage rustled dully on the trees, on the iron roof of the house the dust could be heard, giving rise to a noisy rattle.

Várenka watched this play of the storm from behind the jamb of the door, and Ippolít Sergyéevitch, winking from the dust, stood behind her. The porch was like a box, which is dark inside, but when the lightning flashed, the girl's graceful figure was illuminated by a bluish, spectral light.

"Look . . . look!" cried Várenka, when the lightning rent the thunder-cloud . . . "did you see? The thunder-cloud seems to smile—doesn't it? It greatly resembles a smile . . . there are just such surly and taciturn people—that sort of a man remains silent, keeps silent for ever so long, and then, all of a sudden, he smiles:—his eyes blaze, his teeth gleam. . . And here comes the rain!"

On the roof the big, heavy drops of rain drummed, at long intervals, at first, then closer and closer together, and, at last, with a roaring noise.

"Let us go away . . ." said Ippolít Sergyéevitch . . . "you will get wet."

He found it awkward to stand so close to her, in that dense darkness—awkward and disagreeable. And he thought, as he looked at her neck:

"What if I were to kiss it?"

The lightnings flashed, lighting up half of the heaven, and by their illumination Ippolít Sergyéevitch perceived that Várenka was waving her arms, with cries of rapture, and standing, with her body leaning backward, as though



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presenting her breast to the lightning. He seized her from behind, by the waist, and almost laying his head on her shoulder, he asked her, panting:

“What . . . what . . . is the matter with you?”

“Why, nothing!” she exclaimed with vexation, freeing herself from his arms with a supple, powerful motion of her body.—“Good heavens, how frightened you are . . . and you a man!”

“I was alarmed for you,” he said, in low tone, retreating into the corner.

The contact with her seemed to burn his hands, and filled his breast with inextinguishable fire of desire to embrace her, to embrace her strongly, even to pain. He had lost his self-control, and he wanted to quit the porch, and stand in the rain, where the big drops were lashing the trees like scourges.

“I will go into the house,” said he.

“Let us go,” agreed Várenka with displeasure, and slipping noiselessly past him, she went through the door.

“Ho, ho, ho!” the colonel greeted them.—“What? By order of the commander of the elements you are arrested until further notice? Ho, ho, ho!”

“This is a frightful thunder-storm,” remarked Aunt Lutchítzky, with the utmost seriousness, intently scanning the pale face of their guest.

“I do not like these mad fits of Nature!” said Elizavéta Sergyéevna, with a scornful grimace on her cold face.—“Thunder-storms, snow-storms;—why such a useless waste of a mass of energy?”

Ippolít Sergyéevitch, suppressing his emotion, hardly found the strength to ask his sister calmly:

“Will it last long, do you think?”

“All night,” Margaríta Rodiónovna answered him.

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"I think it will," assented his sister.

"You can't tear yourselves away from here!" declared Várenka, with a laugh.

Polkánoff shuddered, feeling that there was something fatal in her laugh.

"Yes, we shall be obliged to spend the night here," said Elizavéta Sergyéevna. . . . "We cannot pass through the Kámoff thicket of young trees, by night, without defacing the equipage . . . by good luck. . ."

"There are plenty of chambers here," announced Aunt Lutchítzky.

"Then . . I will beg you to excuse me! a thunderstorm has the most shocking effect upon me! . . I should like to know . . . where I am to be quartered . . I will go there, for a few minutes."

Ippolít's words, uttered in a low, broken voice, produced a general alarm.

"Sal ammoniac!" boomed Margaríta Rodiónovna, in her deep bass, and, springing from her chair, she disappeared.

Várenka bustled about the room with astonishment written on her face, and said to him:

"I'll show you directly . . I will assign you a place . . where it is quiet. ."

Elizavéta Sergyéevna was the most composed of them all, and asked him, with a smile:

"Are you dizzy?"

And the colonel said, hoarsely:

"Fiddle-faddle! It will pass off! My comrade, Major Gortáloff, who was killed by the Turks during a sortie, was a dashing fellow! Oh! a rare fellow! A valiant young man! At Sístoff, he walked forward straight on the bayonets, ahead of the soldiers, as calmly as though he

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were leading a dance:—he hewed, slashed, shouted, broke his sword, seized a club, and thrashed the Turks with that. He was a brave man, and there aren't many such! But he, also, got nervous in a thunder-storm, like a woman . . . it was ridiculous! He turned pale, and reeled, as you do, and cried 'akh,' and 'okh!' He was a hard drinker, and a jolly dog, twelve vershóks tall \* . . . imagine how it became him!"

Ippolít Sergyéevitch looked, and listened, made his excuses, calmed them all, and cursed himself. His head really was swimming, and when Margaríta Rodiónovna thrust a smelling-bottle under his nose, and commanded him: "Smell that!" . . . he seized the salts, and began inhaling the penetrating odor into his nostrils, feeling, that this whole scene was comic, and was lowering him in Várenka's eyes.

The rain beat angrily against the window, the lightnings flashed in their glare, the peals of thunder made the panes rattle in a frightened way, and all this reminded the colonel of the uproar of battle.

"During the last Turkish campaign . . . I don't remember where . . . there was just such a tumult as this. Thunder, a torrent of rain, lightning, volleys of firing from the artillery, a scattered fire from the infantry . . . Lieutenant Vyákhireff took out a bottle of brandy, put the neck in his lips, and—bul-bul-bul! And a bullet smashed the bottle to flinders! The Lieutenant looked at the neck of the bottle in his hand, and said: 'Devil take it, they are making war on bottles!' Ho, ho, ho! But I said to him: 'You're mistaken, Lieutenant, the Turks are firing at bottles, but it is you who are making war on bottles!' Ho, ho, ho! Witty, wasn't it?"

\* A vershók is 1½ inches.—*Translator.*

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“Do you feel better?” Aunt Lutchítzky asked Ippolít Sergyéevitch.

He thanked her, with clenched teeth, as he looked at them all with mournfully-angry eyes, and remarked that Várenka was smiling incredulously and with surprise at something which his sister was whispering to her, with her ear bent toward her. At last he succeeded in getting away from these people, and flinging himself on the divan in the little chamber which had been assigned to him, he began to reduce his emotions to order, to the sound of the rain.

Impotent wrath against himself struggled within him with the desire to understand how it had come about, that he had lost the power of self-control,—could the attraction toward that young girl be so deeply seated within him? But he could not manage to settle down upon any one thing, and pursue his thought to the end; a fierce tempest of excited emotions was raging within him. At first he resolved, that he would come to an explanation with her that very day, and immediately rejected this resolve, when he remembered, that behind it stood the obligation which he was reluctant to fulfil, of entering into definite relations to Várenka, and, of course, he could not marry that beautiful monster! He blamed himself for having gone so far in his infatuation for her, and for having lacked boldness in his dealings with her. It seemed to him, that she was entirely ready to give herself to him, and that she was coldly playing with him, playing like a coquette. He called her stupid, an animal, heartless, and answered himself, defending her. And the rain dashed menacingly against the window, and the whole house shook with the peals of thunder.

But there is no fire which does not die out! After a

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prolonged and painful struggle, Ippolít Sergyéevitch succeeded in repressing himself within the bounds of reason, and all his agitated emotions, beating a retreat to some spot deep within his heart, gave way to confusion and indignation at himself.

A young girl, irreparably spoiled by her abnormal surroundings, inaccessible to the suggestions of sound sense, immovably steadfast in her errors,—that strange young girl had turned him almost into an animal, in the course of three months! And he felt himself crushed by the disgrace of the fact. He had done all he could to render her human; if he had not been able to do more, that was no fault of his. But after he had done what he could, he ought to have gone away from her, and he was to blame for not having taken his departure at the proper time, and for having allowed her to evoke in him a shameful outburst of sensuality.

“A less honorable man than myself would have been wiser than I, under the given circumstances, I think.” One unexpected thought stung him painfully:

“Is it honor which restrains me? Perhaps, it is only weakness of feeling? What if it is not feeling, but desire which agitates me thus? Am I capable of loving, in general . . . can I be a husband and a father . . . have I that within me which is required for those obligations? Am I alive?—” As he meditated in this direction, he was conscious of a coldness within him, and of something timid, which humiliated him.

He was soon summoned to supper.

Várenka greeted him with a searching glance, and the amiable query: “is your headie better?”

“Yes, thank you . . .” he replied drily, seating himself at a distance from her, and thinking to himself:

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"She does not even know how to speak: 'is your headie better?' indeed!"

The colonel dozed, nodding his head, and sometimes snoring, all three of the ladies sat in a row on the divan, and chatted about trifles. The noise of the rain on the windows became more gentle, but that faint, persistent sound clearly bore witness to the firm intention of the rain to drench the earth for an interminably long time.

The darkness stared in at the windows, the room was close and the odor of kerosene from the three lamps which were burning, mingling with the odor of the colonel, increased the stifling atmosphere, and the nervous state of Ippolít Sergyéevitch.

He looked at Várenka and reflected:

"She does not come near me . . . why? I wonder whether Elizavéta . . . has been telling her some nonsense or other . . . has been drawing conclusions from her observations of me?"

In the dining-room, fat Thékla was bustling about. Her big eyes kept peering into the drawing-room at Ippolít Sergyéevitch, who was silently smoking a cigarette.

"My lady! Supper is ready . . ." she announced, with a sigh, slowly presenting her figure in the drawing-room door.

"Let us go and eat . . . Ippolít Sergyéevitch, if you please. Aunty, it is not necessary to disturb papa, let him stay here and doze . . . for if he goes there, he will begin to drink again."

"That is sensible . . ." remarked Elizavéta Sergyéevna.

But Aunt Lutchítzky said, in a low voice, with a shrug of the shoulders:

"It's late in the day now, to think of that . . . if he

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drinks, he'll die all the sooner, but, on the other hand, he'll have some pleasure; if he doesn't drink, he will live a year longer, but not so pleasantly."

"And that is sensible, also, . ." remarked Elizavéta Sergyéevna.

At table, Ippolít Sergyéevitch sat beside Várenka, and noticed that the girl's proximity was again arousing an agitation within him. He very much desired to move so close to her that he could touch her gown. And, as he watched himself, according to his wont, he thought, that in his infatuation for her there was much obstinacy of the flesh, but strength of spirit. . .

"A withered heart!"—he cried bitterly to himself. And then he noticed, almost with pride, that he was not afraid to speak the truth about himself, and understood how to interpret every fluctuation of his "ego."

Engrossed with himself, he maintained silence.

At first Várenka addressed him frequently, but on receiving, in reply, curt, monosyllabic words, she evidently lost all desire to converse with him. Only after supper, when they were left entirely alone, did she ask him simply:

"Why are you so depressed? Do you feel bored, or are you displeased with me?"

He replied, that he did not feel depressed, much less was he displeased with her.

"Then what is the matter with you?" she persisted.

"Nothing in particular, apparently . . but . . . sometimes . . an excess of attentions to a man tires him."

"An excess of attentions?" Várenka anxiously put a counter-question.—"Whose? Papa's? For aunty has not been talking with you."

He felt that he was blushing under this invulnerable

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artlessness, or hopeless stupidity. But she, not waiting for his reply, suggested to him, with a smile:

“Don’t be like that, will you? Please! I have a dreadful dislike for gloomy people. . . Come, what do you think of this—let us play cards . . do you know how?”

“I play badly . . and, I must confess, that I am not fond of that form of uselessly wasting time . .” said Ippolít Sergyéevitch, feeling that he was effecting a reconciliation with her.

“I don’t like it either . . but what is one to do? You see, how tiresome it is here!” said the young girl bitterly.—“I know that you have become as you are precisely because it is so tedious.”

He began to assure her of the contrary, and the more he talked, the more ardent did his words become, until, at last, before he knew what he was doing, he wound up:

“If you like, I should not find it tiresome in a desert with you. . .”

“What am I to do for that?” she caught him up, and he perceived that her wish to cheer him up was thoroughly sincere.

“You need do nothing,—” he replied, concealing deep within him the reply which he would have liked to make.

“No, really, you came hither to rest, you have so much difficult work, you require strength, and before your arrival, Líza said to me: ‘You and I will help the learned man to rest and divert himself . . .’ But we . . . what can I do? Really . . I . . . if I could get away from this tediousness . . . I’d kiss you heartily!”

Things grew dark before his eyes, and all the blood flew to his heart so stormily that he fairly reeled.

“Try it . . kiss me . . kiss me . . .” he said, in a low voice, as he stood before her, without seeing her.



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“Oho! So that’s what you are like!” laughed Várenka, and vanished.

He hastened after her, and stopped short, clutching at the jamb of the door, and his whole being yearned toward her.

A few seconds later he saw the colonel:—the old man was sleeping, with his head resting on his shoulder, and snoring sweetly. It was this sound which attracted Ippolít Sergyéevitch’s attention. Then he was compelled to convince himself that the monotonous and lugubrious moaning was not resounding in his own breast, but outside the windows, and that it was the rain weeping, and not his suffering heart. Then anger flashed up within him.

“You are playing with me . . . you are playing with me thus?” . . . he reiterated to himself, gritting his teeth, and he threatened her with some humiliating chastisement. His breast was in a glow, but his feet and his head stung him like sharp icicles.

Laughing merrily over something, the ladies entered, and, at the sight of them, Ippolít Sergyéevitch inwardly pulled himself together. Aunt Lutchítzky was laughing in a dull way, as though bubbles were bursting somewhere in her chest. Várenka’s face was animated by a roguish smile, and Elizavéta Sergyéevna’s laughter was condescendingly restrained.

“Perhaps they are laughing at me!” thought Ippolít Sergyéevitch.

The game of cards which Várenka had suggested did not take place, and this afforded Ippolít Sergyéevitch the possibility of withdrawing to his room, under the pretext of indisposition. As he left the drawing-room, he felt three pairs of eyes fixed on his back, and knew that they

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all expressed astonishment. He was not disconcerted by this, being full of the desire to revenge himself on the naughty little girl, to humiliate her, for having dared to indulge in such pranks, to make her weep, and to gaze at her and laugh aloud at her tears. But his feelings could not remain long at such a pitch of intensity, he was accustomed to subject their fermentation to the power of reason, and he never expressed them until they had cooled down. His vanity was irritated to the point of suffering by the conviction that she was playing with him: but, along with this, there again sprang up the resolve, which had been suppressed by the recent scene, to pay off the girl by utter neglect of her beauty. She must be made to feel of how little consequence she was in his eyes,—it would be good for her, but it must be a lesson, not vengeance, of course.

Such arguments always soothed him, but now there was in his breast something which could not be put aside, which was oppressive, and he simultaneously wished and did not wish to define this singular, almost painful sensation.

“Damn all nameless sensations!” he exclaimed to himself.

But some drops of water, which fell from somewhere to the floor, monotonously beat out:

“Tak . . . tak. . .”

After sitting there an hour, in this state of conflict with himself in the unsuccessful endeavor to comprehend what remained incomprehensible, and was more powerful than all he did comprehend, he decided to go to bed, and sleep, in order that he might depart on the morrow, free from everything which so had worried and humiliated him. But, as he lay in his bed, he involuntarily pictured to him-

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self Várenka as he had beheld her on the porch, with her arms uplifted, as though for an embrace, with her bosom quivering with satisfaction at the flashing of the lightning. And again he reflected, that if he had been bolder with her . . . and then he stopped himself, and finished the thought thus:—then he would have fastened about his neck a mistress who was indisputably very beautiful, but frightfully inconvenient, burdensome, and stupid, with the character of a wildcat, and with the coarsest sensuality, that was certain! . . .

But all at once, in the midst of these thoughts, illuminated by a surmise or a foreboding, he trembled all over, leaped swiftly to his feet, and running to the door of his room, he unlocked it. Then, smiling, he again lay down in his bed, and began to stare at the door, thinking to himself, with hope and rapture:

“That does happen . . . that does happen. . .”

He had read, somewhere, of its having happened once: she had entered during the night, and had surrendered herself, asking nothing, demanding nothing, simply for the sake of the sensation. Várenka . . . assuredly, she had something in common with the heroine of that story,—she was capable of acting thus. In her charming exclamation: “So that’s what you are like!”—there had, perhaps, rung for him, a promise, which he had not understood? And now, suddenly, she would come, clad in white, all trembling with shame and desire!

He rose from his bed several times, lent an ear to the stillness of the house, to the noise of the rain against the windows, and cooled his fevered body. But everything was quiet, and the longed-for sound of footsteps did not ring through the stillness.

“How will she enter?”—he said to himself, and he

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pictured her to himself, on the threshold of the door, with a proud resolute face.—Of course, she would give her beauty to him proudly! It was the gift of an empress. But perhaps she would stand before him with drooping head, abashed, modest, with tears in her eyes. Or, she would make her appearance with a laugh, with a quiet laugh, at his torments, which she knew, which she always noted, though she never showed him that she noticed them, in order to trouble him, and to amuse herself.

In this condition, verging on the delirium of madness, depicting sensuous scenes in his imagination, irritating his nerves, Ippolít Sergyéevitch did not notice that the rain had ceased, and that the stars were peering in through his window, from a clear sky. He was awaiting the sound of footsteps, a woman's footsteps, which should bring him pleasure. But they did not ring out through the slumberous stillness. At times, and only for a brief moment, the hope of embracing the young girl died out in him; then he heard, in the hurried beating of his heart, a reproach to himself, and he recognized the fact that his recent condition was one that was foreign to him, was disgraceful to him, both painful and repulsive. But the inner world of a man is too complicated and varied to permit of any one thing persistently holding all aspirations in equilibrium, and therefore, in the life of every man, there is an abyss, into which he will fall without warning, when the time for it arrives. And the cautious, by the bitter irony of the powers which govern life, fall the most deeply, and injure themselves the most painfully.

He raved until morning dawned, tortured by passion, and when the sun had already risen, footsteps did make themselves heard. He sat up in bed, trembling, with swollen eyes, and waited, and felt that when she did make

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her appearance, he would not be able to utter a single word of gratitude to her. But the steps which were approaching his door were slow, heavy. . . .

And now the door opened softly . . . Ippolít Sergyéevitch threw himself back feebly on his pillow, and, closing his eyes, remained motionless.

“Have I waked you up? I want your boots . . . and your trousers . . .” said fat Thékla, in a sleepy voice, as she approached the bed, with the slowness of an ox. Sighing, yawning, and knocking against the furniture, she gathered up his clothing, and went out, leaving behind her an odor of the kitchen.

He lay there for a long time, broken and annihilated, indifferently watching in himself the slow disappearance of the fragments of those images which had racked his nerves all night.

Again the peasant woman entered, with his clothing, well-brushed, laid it down, and went out, panting heavily. He began to dress himself, without stopping to consider why it was necessary to do it so early. Then, without reflecting, he decided to go and take a bath in the river, and this animated him, to a certain degree. Treading softly over the floors, he passed the room in which the colonel’s snore was booming, then the door of another chamber. He paused, for an instant, before it, but after bestowing an attentive glance upon it, he felt sure that it was not the one. And, at last, half asleep, he emerged into the garden, and walked down the narrow path, knowing that it would lead him to the river.

The weather was clear and fresh, the rays of the sun had not yet lost the rosy hues of dawn. The starlings were chattering vivaciously with one another as they pecked at the cherries. On the leaves, drops of dew quiv-

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ered like diamonds; falling to the earth, in joyous, sparkling tears, they vanished. The earth was damp, but it had swallowed up all the moisture which had fallen during the night, and nowhere was there mud or a puddle visible:—Everything round about was pure, and fresh and new—as though everything had been born that night, and everything was quiet and motionless, as though it had not yet become used to life on the earth, and, beholding the sun for the first time, in silent astonishment it was admiring its marvellous beauty.

Ippolít Sergyéevitch gazed about him, and the shroud of mire which had clothed his mind and soul during the night that was past began to release him from its folds, making way for the pure breath of the new-born day, filled with sweet and refreshing perfumes.

Here was the river, still rose-colored and gold in the rays of the sun. The water, slightly turbid from the rain, faintly reflected the verdure of the banks in its waves. Somewhere, close at hand, a fish was splashing, and this splashing, and the songs of the birds were the only sounds which broke the stillness of the morning. Had it not been damp, he might have lain down on the ground, beside the river, under the canopy of verdure, and remained there until his soul had regained its composure from the emotions which he had experienced.

Ippolít Sergyéevitch walked along the shore, fantastically carved into sandy promontories, and tiny bays surrounded with verdure, and a new picture opened out before him almost every half-dozen paces. As he strolled thus noiselessly, on the very edge of the water, he knew that new and ever new scenes awaited him. And he scrutinized in detail the outlines of every bay, and the forms of the trees, which bent over them, as though de-

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sirous of ascertaining with certainty, precisely how the details of this picture differed from those of the one he had just left behind.

And, all at once, he came to a halt, dazzled.

Before him, up to her waist in the water, stood Várenka, with her head bent over, squeezing her wet hair with her hands. Her body was rosy with the cold and the rays of the sun, drops of water glistened on it like silver scales. They trickled slowly from her shoulders and breast, and fell into the water, and before falling, each drop glittered for a long time in the sunlight, as though it did not wish to leave the body which it had washed. And the water was streaming from her hair, passing through the rosy fingers of the young girl with a tender dripping sound which smote sweetly on the ear.

He gazed at her in ecstasy, with reverence, as at something holy—so pure and harmonious was the beauty of this young girl, in the blooming freshness of her youth, and he felt no other desire, save that of gazing upon her. Above her head, on the branch of a hazel-bush, a nightingale was sobbing and singing, but for him, the whole light of the sun, and all sounds were concentrated in that young girl, amid the waves. And the waves softly stroked her body, noiselessly and caressingly passing around it, in their peaceful flow.

But the good is as brief as the beautiful is rare, and what he beheld, he beheld for a few seconds only, for the girl suddenly raised her head, and with an angry cry, she swiftly dropped into the water up to her neck.

This movement of hers was reflected in his heart—it seemed to fall, shuddering, into a cold which cramped him. The girl gazed at him with flashing eyes, and a frown of anger intersected her brow, distorting her face with fear, scorn and wrath. He heard her indignant voice:

## Várenka Ólesoff

“Begone . . . go away! What are you doing? Aren’t you ashamed of yourself! . . .”

But her words floated to him from somewhere in the distance, dimly, forbidding him nothing. And he bent over the water, stretching out his arms, hardly able to stand on his feet, which were trembling with his efforts to support his unnaturally-curved body, flaming with the torture of passion. The whole of him, every fibre of his being, yearned toward her, and now, at last, he fell upon his knees, which almost touched the water.

She cried out in anger, made a movement to swim away, but halted, saying in a low, agitated voice:

“Go away . . . I will not tell anyone. . . .”

“I cannot . . .” he tried to answer her, but his trembling lips refused to utter the words, for they had no power to say anything.

“Have a care . . . you! Go away!”—screamed the girl.—“You scoundrel! You base man. . . .”

What were these cries to him? He gazed into her eyes with his own drily burning eyes, and kneeling there, he waited for her, and he would have waited, had he known, that someone was brandishing an axe over his head, to smash his skull.

“Oh! you . . . disgusting dog . . . come, I’ll give it to you . . .” whispered the young girl, with loathing, and suddenly dashed out of the water toward him.

She grew before his eyes, grew, as she dazzled him with her beauty,—and now she stood complete, to her very toes, before him, very beautiful and wrathful; he saw this, and awaited her with eager perturbation. Now she bent toward him . . . he flourished his arms, but embraced the air.

And at that moment, a blow in the face from something damp and heavy blinded him, and he fell backward.



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He began swiftly to rub his eyes—damp sand was under his fingers, and upon his head, shoulders, and cheeks blows rained down. But the blows did not evoke pain in him, but some other sentiment, and as he shielded his head with his hands, he did so mechanically rather than consciously. He heard angry sobs. . . . At last, overturned by a powerful blow in the breast, he fell on his back. He was not beaten again. The bushes rustled and grew still. . . .

Incredibly long were the seconds of sullen silence which ensued after that rustling died out. The man still lay there motionless, crushed by his disgrace, and filled with an instinctive longing to hide himself from his shame, he pressed closely to the earth. When he opened his eyes, he perceived the infinitely-deep, blue sky, and it seemed to him that it was swiftly retreating further away from him, higher, higher . . . and this made him breathe so heavily that he groaned, and slowly sank away somewhere, where there were no sensations.

. . . Thus he lay, until he felt cold; when he opened his eyes he saw Várenka bending over him. Through her fingers tears were dripping upon his face. He heard her voice:

. . . “Well—is this nice? . . . How will you go to the house in this state? . . . all dirty, muddy, wet, and torn . . . Ekh, you stupid! . . . Do say that you tumbled into the water from the bank . . . Aren’t you ashamed of yourself? For, you know, I might have killed you . . . if I had happened to get hold of something else.”

And she said a great deal more to him, but all this did not, in the least, diminish or augment what he felt. And he made no reply to her words, until she told him that she was going. Then he asked softly:

## Várenka Ólesoff

“ You . . . I shall not see you . . . any more? ”

And when he asked this he remembered and understood that he ought to say to her: “ Forgive me. . . ”

But he did not manage to say it, because, with a wave of her hand, she vanished among the trees.

He sat, with his back propped against the trunk of a tree, or something, and stared dully at the turbid water of the river as it flowed past his feet.

And it flowed slowly . . . slowly . . . slowly on. . .



**COMRADES**



# COMRADES

## I.

THE hot July sun shone dazzlingly over Smólkina, flooding its aged huts with an abundant torrent of brilliant rays. There was an especially great amount of sunlight on the roof of the village Elder's hut, which had recently been covered afresh with smoothly planed boards, yellow and fragrant. It was Sunday, and almost the entire population of the village had come out into the street, thickly overgrown with grass, and sprinkled with hillocks of dried mud. In front of the Elder's hut, a large group of peasant men and women had assembled, some were sitting on the earth, which was banked up around the foundation of the hut, others flat on the ground, others, still, were standing; small children were chasing one another in and out among them, every now and then receiving from their elders angry shouts and raps.

The centre of the throng was a tall man, with long, drooping mustaches. From his light-brown face, covered with a thick, blue mark of beard and a network of deep wrinkles, from the locks of gray hair which hung down beneath a dirty straw hat,—one might judge that this man was fifty years of age. He was staring at the ground, and the nostrils of his large, cartilaginous nose were quivering, and when he raised his head, casting a glance at the windows of the Elder's hut, his eyes became visible,—large, sad, even gloomy eyes, which were deeply sunken in their orbits,

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while his thick eyebrows threw a shadow over the dark pupils. He was clad in the cinnamon-brown, tattered cassock of a monastic lay-brother, which barely covered his knees, and was girt about him with a rope. On his back was a canvas wallet, in his right hand, a long staff with an iron ferrule, with his left hand he clutched at his breast. The people round about stared at him suspiciously, sneeringly, with scorn, and, at last, with plain delight, that they had succeeded in catching the wolf before he had managed to do any damage to their flock. He had passed through the village, and, approaching the window of the Elder's hut, he had asked for a drink. The Elder had given him kvas \* and had talked with him. But the wayfarer, contrary to the habit of pilgrims, had answered very reluctantly. . . . The Elder had asked him if he had a passport, and it turned out that he had not. And they had detained the wayfarer, resolved to send him to the District Council. The Elder had selected the sótsky † as his escort, and now, inside his hut, he was giving the latter instructions concerning the journey, leaving the prisoner in the midst of the crowd, who were making merry at his expense.

As the prisoner had been brought to a halt at the trunk of a white willow tree, so he remained standing, with his curved back resting against it.

But now, on the porch of the hut, a wall-eyed old man, with a foxy face, and a small, gray, wedge-shaped beard, made his appearance. He lowered his booted feet sedately from step to step, and his round little belly waggled solidly under his long shirt of sarpínka.‡ And over his shoulders peered the square, bearded face of the policeman.

\* See foot-note on p. 13.—*Translator.*

† A sort of police-captain, elected by the peasants.—*Translator.*

‡ See foot-note on p. 242.

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"You understand, Efímushka?" the Elder asked the policeman.

"What is there to understand? I understand all about it. That means, that I, the policeman of Smólkina, am bound to conduct this man to the Rural Chief, and—that's all there is to it!"—and having uttered his speech with distinct articulation, and with comical importance, the policeman winked at the spectators.

"And the document?"

"The document—lives in my breast."

"Well, all right!" said the Elder argumentatively, and he added, as he scratched his ribs violently:

"Then go ahead, and God be with you!"

"Start up! Shall we march on, father?" the policeman smilingly asked the prisoner.

"You might provide a conveyance," replied the latter, in a low tone to the policeman's question. The Elder grinned.

"A con-ve-eyance! Get out with you! There are lots of tramps like you cropping up in the fields and villages . . . there wouldn't be horses enough to go around for them all. So trot along on your own legs. That's the way!"

"Never mind, father, we'll walk!"—said the policeman encouragingly. . . . "Do you think it's far from us? With God's blessing, not more than twenty versts! Yes, and it can't be as much as that. You and I will soon roll there. And there you can rest yourself."

"In the cooler . . ."\* explained the Elder.

"That's nothing," the policeman hastened to remark . . . "When a man's tired he can rest even in jail. And

\*This is not arbitrary slang, but a literal translation of the word, *kholódnaya*—the cooler, or cold place.—*Translator*.



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then—the cooler—it's refreshing . . . after a hot day—it's very nice indeed there!"

The prisoner cast a surly glance at his escort—the latter smiled frankly and cheerfully.

"Come on, now, respected father! Farewell, Vasíl Gavrílitch! Go along!"

"The Lord be with you, Efímushka!—Keep a sharp lookout!"

"Look as sharp—as though you had three eyes!" put in a young fellow in the crowd.

"Lo-ook here now! Am I a baby, I'd like to know?"

And they set off, keeping close to the huts, in order to walk in the strip of shade. The man in the cassock went first, with the loose but swinging gait of a pedestrian accustomed to walking. The policeman, with a stout cudgel in his hand, walked behind.

Efímushka was a small peasant, low of stature, squarely built, with a broad, kindly face, framed in a light-brown beard which fell in tufts, and began just below his clear, gray eyes. He was almost always smiling at something, displaying strong, yellow teeth, and wrinkling the skin between his eyebrows, as though he were on the point of sneezing. He was clad in a long, full smock, whose skirts were tucked into his girdle, in order that they might not entangle his legs, on his head was stuck a dark-green cap without a visor, which was pulled down over his brows in front, and bore a strong resemblance to a prison-cap.

His companion walked on, paying no attention to him, as though he were not even conscious of his presence behind him. Their way led along a narrow country road; it wound, in serpentine curves, through a waving sea of rye, and the shadows of the travellers crept over the gold of the ears.

On the horizon the crest of a forest shone blue, on the wayfarers' left, the sown fields stretched out into the end-

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less distance, and among them lay the dark blot of a village, and beyond it, again, were fields, which vanished in pale-blue mist.

On their right, from behind a clump of willows, the spire of a belfry, still surrounded by scaffoldings, and not yet painted, pierced the blue sky—it gleamed so brilliantly in the sun, that it was painful to look at.

Larks were trilling in the sky, corn-flowers smiled among the rye, and the weather was hot—almost stifling. The dust flew up from under the travellers' feet.

Efímushka began to feel bored. Being a great chatterer by nature, he could not hold his tongue for long, and clearing his throat, he suddenly struck up, in a falsetto voice:

“Hey—ekh—the-ere, and why-y is thi-i-is . . .  
An' why do-oth sor-row gnaw my heart?”

“If your voice gives out, blow it up to its limits! Hm—ye-es . . . but I did use to sing. . . The Víshenki teacher used to say,—‘come on, now, Efímushka, strike up!’ And he and I burst into a flood of song! he was a just young fellow. . .”

“Who was he?” inquired the man in the cassock, with a bass voice.

“Why, the Víshenki teacher. . .”

“Víshenki—was that his name?”

“Víshenki is the name of a village, brother. But the teacher's name was Pável Mikháílitch. He was a first-class man. He died three years ago. . . .”

“Was he young?”

“He was under thirty. . . .”

“What did he die of? . . .”

“Of grief, I suppose.”

Efímushka's companion cast a sidelong glance at him, and burst out laughing.

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"You see, my dear man, this is the way it was—he taught, he taught seven years in succession, and then he began to cough. He coughed, and coughed, and began to grieve. . . Well, and with the grief, of course, he began to drink vódka. But Father Alexéi did not like him, and when he took to drink, that Father Alexéi sent off a document to the town—thus and so, says he—the teacher drinks, and 'tis nothing but a scandal. Then they sent another document from the town, in reply, and a woman teacher. She was a very long woman, and bony, with a huge nose. Well Pável Mikháïlitch sees that his business is done for. He was grieved; 'here I've taught and taught,' says he . . 'akh, you devils!' He went from the school straight to the hospital, and five days later, he gave up his soul to God. . . . That's all. . . ."

They walked on for some time in silence. The forest drew nearer to the pedestrians with every step, growing before their very eyes, and turning green from blue.

"Are we going through the forest?" inquired Efímushka's companion.

"We shall cut across the corner of it, about half a verst. But why? Hey? What are you up to? I perceive that you are a goose, respected father!"

And Efímushka laughed, and wagged his head.

"What do you mean?" inquired the prisoner.

"Why, nothing. Akh, you stupid! 'Shall we go through the forest?' says he. You're simple, my dear man, nobody with any sense would have asked that question. Any sensible man would have walked straight up to the forest, and then. . . ."

"What?"

"Nothing! I see through you, brother. Ekh, you dear, sly humbug! No—you drop that idea—about the forest! Do you think you can get the better of me? Why, I could

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manage three such as you, and I could whip you with one hand, while the other was bound to my body. . . Do you understand?"

"Yes! You fool!—" said the prisoner, curtly and significantly.

"What? Did I guess you?"—said Efímushka triumphantly.

"Blockhead! What have you guessed?" said the prisoner, with a wry smile.

"About the forest . . . I understand! . . . 'I,' says he—that is you,—'when we come to the forest, will cut him down'—meaning me,—'I'll cut him down, and make off across the fields, and the forests?' Isn't that it?"

"You're stupid . . ." said the man who had been divined, shrugging his shoulders.—"Come now, where could I go to?"

"Well, wherever you please—that's your affair."

"But where?"—Efímushka's companion was either angry, or was very anxious to hear from his escort precisely where he could go.

"Wherever you please, I tell you!" repeated Efímushka calmly.

"I have no place to run to, brother, none!"—said his companion quietly.

"Oh, co-ome now!" ejaculated the escort incredulously, and even waved his hand. "There's always some place to run to. The earth is big. There's always room for one man on it."

"Well, what do you mean? Do you mean that I am to run away?"—inquired the prisoner with curiosity, and he laughed.

"What a man you are! You're very fine! Is that proper? If you run away, whom can they put in prison, instead of

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you? They'll put me there in your place. No, I only said that by way of talking. . . ."

"You're a blessed fool . . . yet you seem a good sort of peasant,—" said Efímushka's travelling-companion with a sigh. Efímushka hastened to agree with him.

"That's just what some folks do call me, a blessed fool . . . and as for my being a good sort of a peasant—that's true too. I'm straightforward, that's the chief thing. Some folks always act in a roundabout way, with guile, but what's that to me? I'm a man who is alone in the world. If you're guileful, you die, and if you live uprightly, you die. So I try to be as straightforward as possible."

"You do well!"—remarked Efímushka's companion indifferently.

"Why not? Why should I begin to squirm in my soul, when I'm alone, that's all there is to it. I'm a free man, brother. As I like, so I live, I pass my life according to the law. . . . Ye-es. . . . And what is your name?"

"My name? Well . . . call me Pável Ivánoff, if you like. . . ."

"Very well! Are you an ecclesiastic?"

"N-no. . . ."

"Well, now? Why, I thought you were. . . ."

"Did you think so from my dress?"

"Yes, exactly so! You're for all the world like a runaway monk, or a disrobed priest. . . . But your face doesn't suit, in the face you look more like a soldier. . . . God knows what sort of a man you are"—and Efímushka cast an inquisitive glance at the pilgrim. The latter sighed, adjusted his hat on his head, mopped his perspiring brow, and asked the policeman:

"Do you smoke tobacco?"

"Oh, mercy me! Of course I smoke!"

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He pulled a dirty tobacco-pouch out of his bosom, and bending his head, but not halting, he began to stuff tobacco into a clay pipe.

"There now, smoke that!"—The prisoner stopped, and bending toward a match which his escort lighted, he drew in his cheeks. Blue smoke floated up into the air.

"From what class do you come? Are you a petty burgher?"

"A noble . . ." said the prisoner briefly, and spat to one side, on the ears of rye, already clothed in a golden glow.

"E-eh! That's clever! Then how do you come to be going about without a passport?"

"Why, I'm just roaming."

"Well—well! That's practical! Your nobility is accustomed to this wolf's life, I guess? E-ekh, you unfortunate!"

"Well, that will do . . . stop your chatter,"—said the unfortunate curtly.

But Efímushka, with growing curiosity and sympathy, scrutinized the passportless man, and wagging his head thoughtfully, he went on:

"A-ai! How Fate does play with a man, when you come to think of it! Now, I suppose it is true that you are a nobleman, because you carry yourself so magnificently. Have you been living long in this manner?"

The man with the magnificent carriage cast a surly glance at Efímushka, and waved him off with his hand, as he would have treated a troublesome wasp.

"Drop it, I say! Why are you persisting, like a woman?"

"Now, don't you get angry!"—remarked Efímushka soothingly. "I'm speaking with pure motives. . . I have a very kind heart. . . ."

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“ Well, that’s lucky for you. . . . But your tongue wags incessantly—that’s unlucky for me.”

“ Well, all right! I can hold my tongue . . . a man can hold his tongue if people don’t want to listen to his conversation. But you’re getting angry without any cause. . . . Is it my fault that you have been compelled to live the life of a vagabond? ”

The prisoner halted, and set his teeth so tightly, that his cheek-bones stood out like two acute angles, and the gray bristles on them stood on end. He eyed Efímushka from head to foot, with eyes puckered up and blazing with wrath.

But before Efímushka observed this pantomime, he began again to cover the ground with long strides.

On the countenance of the loquacious policeman lay an impress of pensiveness. He stared upward, at the spot whence the trills of the larks poured forth, and whistled to them through his teeth, brandishing his cudgel in time with his steps. They reached the edge of the forest. It stood like a dark, motionless wall—not a sound was wafted from it to greet the travellers. The sun was already setting, and its slanting rays dyed the crests of the trees with crimson and gold. From the trees breathed forth a fragrant dampness, the twilight, and concentrated silence, which filled the forest gave birth to a feeling of awe.

When a forest stands before one’s eyes, dark and motionless, when it is completely submerged in mysterious stillness, and every tree seems to be listening keenly to something—then the forest appears to be full of something living, which is only temporarily keeping quiet. And one waits, with the expectation that the next moment something vast and incomprehensible to human understanding will emerge from it, will emerge, and begin to speak in a mighty voice about the great mysteries of Nature’s creation. . . .

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## II.

ON reaching the edge of the forest, Efímushka and his companion decided to take a rest, and seated themselves on the grass, near a large oak stump. The prisoner slowly drew the wallet from his shoulders, and indifferently inquired of the policeman:

“Would you like some bread?”

“If you give it, I’ll chew it,” replied Efímushka, with a smile.

And so they began, in silence, to chew their bread. Efímushka ate slowly, sighing all the while, and gazing off somewhere into the distance, across a field on his left, but his companion was entirely engrossed in the process of satisfying his hunger, ate fast, and munched noisily, measuring his crust of bread with his eyes. The field darkened, the grain had already lost its golden hue, and had become rosy-yellow, tufts of dark clouds crept up the sky from the southwest, and shadows fell from them upon the plain,—fell, and crept over the ears of grain to the forest, where sat the two dark human figures. And the trees, also, cast dark shadows on the earth, and from the shadow sadness breathed upon the soul.

“I thank thee, oh Lord!—” exclaimed Efímushka, gathering up from the skirts of his smock the crumbs of bread, and licking them from his palm with his tongue. “The Lord has fed me—no one saw it, and he who saw it, took no offence! Friend! Shall we sit here a little hour? Shall we get to the cooler soon enough?”

The friend shook his head.

“Well, then, see here. . . . This place is very beautiful, it’s a memorable spot to me. . . . Yonder, to the left, the manor of the Tutchkóffs used to stand. . . .”



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"Where?" . . . asked the prisoner quickly, turning in the direction in which Efímushka waved his hand. . . .

"Why, yonder—beyond the point of forest. . . . Everything around here used to belong to them. They were the richest of gentry, but after the Emancipation they went to decay. . . . I used to belong to them,—all of us used to be their serfs. It was a big family. . . . The Colonel himself was Alexándor Nikítitch Tutchkóff. There were children: four sons—what has become of them all now? It's as if people were blown away by the wind, like the leaves in autumn. Only Iván Alexándrovitch remains,—I'm taking you to him now, he's our Rural Chief. . . . He's an old man. . . ."

The prisoner began to laugh. He laughed in a low tone, with a peculiar sort of internal laughter,—his chest and belly heaved, but his face remained immovable, only through his grinning teeth broke forth dull sounds, resembling a bark.

Efímushka shrivelled up apprehensively, and drawing his cudgel nearer to his hand, he asked him:

"What's the matter with you? Have you got a fit, or what? . . . hey?"

"Nothing . . . it will pass off," said the prisoner spasmodically but amiably. "You were telling me, you know. . . ."

"Well, ye-es! So you see, these Tutchkóff gentry were great folks, and now they are gone. . . . Some have died, others have disappeared, and left no trace behind them. . . . There was one in particular . . . the youngest of them all. His name was Víctor . . . Vítia. He and I were chums. . . . At the time when the Emancipation was proclaimed, he and I were fourteen years old. . . . What a boy he was, may the Lord remember his soul for good! Pure as a brook! Like it he

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streamed on all day long, and rippled like it. . . . Where is he now? Is he alive or not?"

"How was he so good?" his companion softly asked Efimushka.

"In every way!"—exclaimed Efimushka.—"In beauty, brains, kind heart. . . . Akh, you strange man! my darling, my ripe berry! you ought to have seen us two in those days . . . aī, aī, aī! What games we played, how merry life was,—the sweetest of the sweet! He used to shout—'Efimka! \*—let's go hunting!' He had a gun,—his father gave it to him on his saint's day,—and I used to carry the gun. And we would ramble about here in the forest for one day, two days, three days! When we got home, he got a scolding and I got a thrashing; and, behold, the next day, it was again: 'Efimka! let's go after mushrooms!—' He and I killed birds by the thousand! We gathered puds† of mushrooms! He used to catch butterflies and beetles, and stick them on pins, in little boxes. It was a busy time! He taught me to read and write. . . . 'Efimka,' says he, 'I'll teach you. Go ahead!—' Well, and so I began. 'Say A,' says he! I yell—'A-A!' We laugh! At first I looked on the matter as a joke—what does a peasant want with reading and writing? Well, and he exhorted me: 'Your mind is given to you, you fool, so that you may learn. . . . If you know how to read and write,' says he, 'you'll know how a man must live, and where to seek the truth.' . . . Of course, a little child is apt, evidently he had heard that sort of speech from his elders, and began to talk like that himself. . . . It was all nonsense, of course. . . . That sort of knowledge is in the heart, and the heart will point out about the

\* Efimushka and Efimka are both diminutives of Efim,—Euthymus.  
—*Translator.*

† A pud is thirty-six pounds.—*Translator.*

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right. . . . It—the heart—is quick-sighted. Well, and so he taught me, and he got so interested in that matter, that he wouldn't let me rest! I was worn out! I entreated him! 'Vitya,' says I, 'reading and writing are beyond my power, I can't conquer them,' says I. Then ho-ow he did roar at me! 'I'll thrash you with papa's kazák whip,—learn your lesson!—' 'Akh, have mercy! I'll learn. . . .' Once I ran away from my lesson. I just jumped up and took to my heels! Then he hunted me all day long, with his gun—he wanted to shoot me. He said to me afterward—'if I had met you that day,' says he, 'I'd have shot you!' You see what a sharp fellow he was! Inflexible, fiery—a real gentleman. . . . He was fond of me; he had a flaming soul. . . . Once my daddy decorated my back with the reins, and when he, that Vitya, saw it, he came to our hut,—and my heavens!—what a row! he turned all pale, and shook all over, and clenched his fists, and wanted to go after daddy in the loft! 'How dared you do it?' says he. Daddy says—'I'm his father! Aha!—' 'Well, very good, father, I won't come to an agreement with you, until your back is just like Efímka's.' He burst out crying after these words and ran away. . . . Well, and what do you say to that, father? For he kept his word. Evidently, he instigated the house-servants, or something of that sort, only, one day daddy came home grunting; he tried to take off his shirt, but it had dried fast to his back. . . . Father was very angry with me that time—'all on account of you,' says he, 'I'm suffering, you nobleman's toady.' And he gave me a healthy licking. But as for my being a nobleman's toady, he was wrong about that,—I wasn't anything of the sort. . . ."

"That's true, Efímka, you were not!" said the prisoner in confirmation, and trembled all over. "It's immediately

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apparent that you could not be a nobleman's toady," he added rather hastily.

"Exactly so!" exclaimed Efímushka. . . "I simply loved him, that Vítia. . . He was just the sort of a child whom everyone loved,—and not I alone. . . . He used to make various remarks. . . I don't remember what they were, more than thirty years have passed since those days—Akh, oh Lord! where is he now? I think, that if he is still alive, he must be either occupying a very lofty place, or . . . be seething in the very gulf of misery. . . Such is human life! It boils and boils, and nothing sensible ever comes of it. . . And people disappear . . . and one feels sorry for the people, deadly sorry!" Efímushka, sighing heavily, hung his head upon his breast. The silence lasted for a minute.

"And are you sorry for me?" asked the prisoner merrily. Merrily is the only way to describe his manner of asking, his whole face was illuminated by such a fine, kind smile. . .

"Yes, you queer man!—" exclaimed Efímushka,—“how can I help being sorry for you? What are you, when you stop to think about it? If you tramp about in this way, evidently, it is because you have nothing of your own on earth, neither nook nor chip. . . But perhaps you are bearing a great sin with you—who knows? you're an unfortunate man—that's the only word for it. . . .”

"Exactly so,—" said the prisoner.

And again they fell silent. The sun had set now, and the shadows had grown more dense. The air smelled of damp earth, and flowers, and forest mould. . . They sat for a long time, thus silent.

"Well, however beautiful it is here, we must go on. . . . We have still eight versts to walk. . . . Come on there, father, get up!"

"Let us sit a little longer,—" entreated the father.

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"Well, I have no objection, I'm fond of being near the forest by night myself. . . Only, when shall we get to the Rural Chief? He'll scold me—tell me I'm late."

"Never mind, he won't scold. . ."

"Do you mean to speak a word for me?—" grinned the policeman.

"Yes."

"You don't say so?"

"Why not?"

"You're a joker! He'll pepper you!"

"Will he thrash me?"

"He's fierce! And clever—he'll give you a whack in the ear, and it will be as good as a scythe through your legs."

"Well, we'll give him as good as he sends," said the prisoner confidently, tapping his escort on the shoulder in a friendly way.

This was familiar, and Efímushka did not like it. Look at it as you might, he was one of the authorities, and that goose must not forget that Efímushka had his brass shield of office in his breast. Efímushka rose to his feet, took his stick in his hand, hung the shield outside, in the very middle of his breast, and said sternly:

"Get up, come along!"

"I won't!" said the prisoner.

Efímushka was abashed, and, with starting eyes, he made no reply for a minute, not understanding how the prisoner had come to be such a jester all of a sudden.

"Well, don't loll there, come along!" he repeated more gently.

"I won't come along!" repeated the prisoner, with decision.

"Do you mean that you won't come with me?" shouted Efímushka, in wrath and amazement.

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“Exactly that. I want to spend the night here with you. . . . Come now, light a fire.”

“I’ll teach you to spend the night! I’ll light such a fire in your ribs—I’ll make it pleasant for you!” menaced Efímushka. But, in the depths of his soul, he was amazed. The man said, “I won’t go”—but he offered no opposition, did not begin a fight, but simply lay still on the ground, and nothing more. What was he to do?

“Don’t yell, Efím,—” the prisoner calmly advised him.

Again Efímushka was reduced to silence, and shifting from foot to foot, over his prisoner, he stared at him with bursting eyes. And the man stared at him, stared and smiled. Efímushka pondered heavily what he was to do next.

And what had made this vagabond, hitherto so surly and cross, now suddenly turn so amiable? And what if he were to fall upon him, bind his hands, give him a cut or two across the throat, and so end it all? And in the very severest tone of authority which he had at his command, Efímushka said:

“Well, you burnt-out scrap, see here—you’ve put on airs enough, and I’ve had enough of it! Get up! Or I’ll bind you, and then you’ll go, never fear! Understand? Well? Look out—I’ll thrash you!”

“Me, do you mean?” laughed the prisoner.

“Whom do you suppose?”

“You, Efím Grýzloff, will thrash Vítya Tutchkóff?”

“Akh—you’re firing high!” exclaimed Efímushka, in astonishment,—“but who are you, anyway? What sort of an exhibition are you going through with me?”

“Come, stop shouting, Efímushka, it’s time you recognized me,—” said the prisoner, with a calm smile, and rose to his feet,—“won’t you exchange greetings!”

Efímushka staggered back from the hand which was ex-

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tended to him, and stared, with all his eyes, into the face of his prisoner. Then his lips quivered, and his whole face wrinkled up. . . .

“Víkter Alexándrovitch, and is it really you?” he asked in a whisper.

“If you like—I will show you my papers? But the best way of all is—to recall old times. . . . Come now . . . how you fell into the wolf’s hole, in the Ramén pine woods? And how I climbed a tree for a bird’s nest, and hung head downward from a bough? And how we stole cream from the old dairy-woman, Petróna? And the fairy-tales she used to tell us?”

Efímushka sat down heavily on the ground, and began to laugh in a confused manner.

“Do you believe me?” the prisoner asked him, and sat down beside him, gazing into his face, and laying his hand on the other’s shoulder. Efímushka remained dumb. It had become completely dark around them. A confused rustling and whispering arose in the forest. Far away, somewhere in the underbrush, a nocturnal bird was moaning. A dark cloud crept over the forest, with an almost imperceptible movement.

“Well, Efím,—aren’t you glad to see me? Or are you glad? Ekh, you . . . saintly soul! You are exactly as you were when you were a child . . . aren’t you, Efím? Come, say something, you dear monster!”

Efímushka began to blow his nose violently on the tail of his smock. . . .

“Come, brother! Aï, aï, aï!—” the prisoner shook his head reproachfully. “What ails you? Shame on you! You’re almost fifty years old, and you busy yourself with such a nonsensical matter! Stop it!—” and embracing the policeman’s shoulders, he shook him gently. The police-

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man began to laugh in a quivering tone, and, at last, he began to speak, but without looking at his companion:

“Well, what’s the matter with me? . . . I’m glad . . . So it is really you? How am I to believe it? You, and . . . such an affair! Vítýa . . . and in such a guise! In the cooler. . . . Without a passport . . . You nourish yourself on bread. . . . You have no tobacco. . . . Oh Lord! Is that right? If it had been I, and you had been the policeman . . . it would have been easier to bear! But now, how has it turned out? How can I look you in the eye? I have always remembered you with joy . . . Vítýa,—I have thought, and my very heart leaped with gladness. But now—what have you come to! Oh, Lord . . . why, if I were to tell the folks, they wouldn’t believe me. . . .”

He muttered his broken phrases, with his eyes riveted obstinately on his feet, and his hand kept clutching at his breast and at his throat.

“But don’t you tell the folks about all this, it’s not necessary. And stop grieving—is it any fault of yours? Don’t worry about me. . . . I have my papers, I did not show them to the Elder, because I did not wish to have them recognize me there. . . . My brother Iván will not put me in prison, but, on the contrary, he will help me to get on my feet. . . . I shall stay with him, and you and I will go hunting again together. . . . You see how well everything is arranging itself.”

Vítýa said this affectionately, in the tone with which grown-up people soothe grieving children. Out of the forest, to meet the dark cloud, rose the moon, and the edge of the cloud, silvered by her rays, took on soft, opalescent hues. The quails were calling among the grain, a corn-crake was chattering somewhere. . . . The night mist grew denser and denser.



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"That's a fact . . ." began Efímushka, softly, "Iván Alexándrovitch will rejoice to see his own brother, and you, of course, will adapt yourself to life again. . . . That's all true. . . . And we will go hunting. . . . Only, everything isn't as it should be. . . . I thought you were doing great deeds in life! But instead . . . just see . . ."

Vítya Tutchkóff burst out laughing.

"I have done deeds enough, brother Efímushka. . . . I have run through my share of the estate, I have not grown rich in the service, I have been an actor, I have been a clerk in the timber trade, then I kept actors myself . . . then I was burnt out, I got over head and ears in debt, and got mixed up in a scandal . . . ekh! I've done every sort of thing. . . . And everything has been a failure!"

The prisoner waved his hand, and began to laugh good-humoredly.

"I'm no longer a gentleman, brother Efímushka. . . . I've cured myself of that. Now you and I will begin to live! Won't we? Come, now! Gather your wits together."

"Why, I don't mind . . ." began Efímushka, in a suppressed voice,—“only, I'm ashamed. Here I've been saying all sorts of things to you . . . nonsensical words, and, in general . . . a peasant—everybody knows what he's like. . . . So we are to pass the night here, you say? I'll just build a fire. . . ."

"All right, go ahead. . . ."

The prisoner stretched himself out on the ground, breast upward, and the policeman vanished into the border of the forest, whence there immediately proceeded a crackling and a rustling of branches. Efímushka speedily made his appearance, with an armful of dry brush-wood, and a moment later a serpent of fire began to crawl merrily among the twigs on the little hillock.

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The old comrades gazed thoughtfully at it, as they sat opposite each other, and smoked the pipe by turns.

"It's exactly as it used to be,"—remarked Efímushka sadly.

"Only the times are different,—" said Tutchkóff.

"Ye-es, life has become harsher in character. . . . Here . . . it has . . . broken you up. . . ."

"Well, that isn't certain, as yet—whether it has conquered me, or I have conquered it. . . ." laughed Tutchkóff.

They fell silent.

"Ah? Oh Lord God! Vítia! And here's a nice Sunday greeting!" \* exclaimed Efímushka bitterly.

"Eh, enough of that! What's past is past,—" Tutchkóff comforted him philosophically.

Behind them rose the dark wall of the forest, which was softly whispering about something, the fire crackled merrily, around it the shadows danced noiselessly, and over the plain lay impenetrable mist.

\* It is customary to congratulate one another on Sundays and holidays. In the higher circles of society, kisses are often exchanged.—*Translator.*

THE END



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